A WOMAN'S SOUL

by

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CHAPTER I

JEANNE had finished packing, and moved towards the window; but the rain had not yet stopped.

It had resounded all night long on the windows and the roofs. It seemed as if the low sky, charged with water, had burst, emptying itself on the earth, diluting it to a pap, melting it like sugar. Gusts of wind, breathing an oppressive warmth, swept past. The gurgling of the overflowed kennels filled the deserted streets, whilst the houses, like sponges, absorbed the damp, which penetrated inside and made the walls ooze from cellar to attic.

Jeanne, who had left her convent the day before, free at last for ever and ready to enjoy all the happiness of life of which she had so long dreamt, was afraid her father would hesitate to start, if the weather did not improve; and, for the hundredth time since the morning, she examined the horizon.

Then she noticed she had forgotten to put her calendar in the travelling-bag. The little card, divided into months, hung on the wall, and showed

in the middle of a design the date of the current year 1819 in gilt letters. She took it and crossed out with a pencil the first four columns, erasing every Saint's name up to May 2, the day she left the convent.

A voice behind the door called: "Jeannette!"

Jeanne replied: "Come in, papa." And her father appeared.

Baron Simon-Jacques Le Perthuis des Vauds was a nobleman of the past century, crotchety and good-hearted. An enthusiastic disciple of J. J. Rousseau, he felt all the tenderness of a lover for Nature, the fields, the woods, animals.

An aristocrat by birth, he instinctively hated '93; but, as a philosopher by temperament and liberal by education, he loathed tyranny with an inoffensive and declamatory hatred.

His great strength and his great weakness lay in his kindliness, a kindliness which had not enough arms wherewith to caress, to give, to embrace; the kindliness of a creator, widely-diffused, meeting with no resistance from himself, like a benumbing of a nerve of volition, a gap in energy, almost a vice.

A theorist by nature, he planned out a whole scheme of education for his daughter, wishing to make her happy, good, straightforward and tender-hearted.

She had remained at home till she was twelve, and then, in spite of her mother's tears, she was sent to the Sacré Cœur.

He had kept her strictly shut up, cloistered and concealed there, ignorant of human things. He wanted her to return chaste at seventeen, in order

himself to steep her in a kind of bath of rational poetry; and in the fields, amid the fecundated soil, to open her soul, to enlighten her ignorance by the sight of the *naïf* love, the simple tenderness of the animals, the serene laws of life.

She looked now like a portrait by Veronese, with her hair of a shining blonde which, one might say, had left its mark on her skin, an aristocratic skin scarcely shaded with pink, covered with a slight down, of a kind of pale velvet which could be seen a little in the sun. Her eyes were blue, of that opaque blue which you may see in the eyes of Dutch china figures.

She had a small mole on her left nostril, another on her chin on the right side, on which a few hairs curled so like the skin that they could hardly be distinguished from it. She was tall, well-developed in bust, with a supple waist. Her clear voice appeared sometimes too shrill; but her frank laugh filled every one about her with joy. She used often, with a familiar gesture, to put both her hands to her temples as if to smooth her hair.

She ran to her father and kissed him, with a hug. "Well, are we off?" she said.

He smiled, shook his hair, which was already white and which he wore rather long, and pointing to the window:

"How could you travel in such weather?"

But she implored him, coaxingly and tenderly: "Oh, papa, do please let us go. It will be fine in the afternoon."

"But your mother will never agree to it."

"Yes, she will; I promise you: I'll answer for it."

"If you succeed in persuading your mother, I am quite ready."

And she rushed to the Baroness's room, for she had been looking forward to this day of departure with growing impatience.

Since her entry into the Sacré Cœur she had not left Rouen, as her father would not allow her any distraction before the age he had fixed On two occasions only she had been taken to Paris for a fortnight, but that was another town, and she dreamt only of the country.

She was now going to spend the summer on their estate, Les Peuples, an old family château planted on the cliffs near Ypoit; and she promised herself an infinity of joy in the free life by the waves. It was further understood that a present would be made to her of the manor, where she would always live when she was married.

And the rain, which had been falling since the previous evening without respite, was the first big disappointment in her life.

However, in three minutes she came running out of her mother's room, crying, for the whole house to hear:

"Papa, papa! mamma is willing. Let the carriage be ready."

The downpour was not diminishing at all; it might even be said to have redoubled in energy when the barouche came to the door.

Jeanne was ready to get in when the Baroness came down the stair supported on one side by her husband, and on the other by a tall maid, who was as strong and well-set as a youth. She was a Norman from Caux, who seemed at least twenty,

although she was eighteen at the most. She was treated by the family somewhat like a second daughter, because she was Jeanne's foster-sister Her name was Rosalie.

Her chief duty consisted in guiding the footsteps of her mistress, who had grown huge in size within the last few years, owing to a hypertrophy of the heart, of which she was incessantly complaining.

The Baroness, breathing hard, reached the threshold of the old hôtel, gazed at the courtyard where the water was rushing along, and muttered:

"It's really not reasonable."

Her husband replied, smiling:

"It was you who wanted to, Madame Adélaïde."

She had the pompous name of Adélaïde, so he always prefaced it by "madame," with a certain air of mock respect.

She then began to move again, and got with difficulty into the carriage, all of whose springs bent under her. The Baron sat down by her side, Jeanne and Rosalie faced them.

Ludivine, the cook, brought a quantity of rugs which they arranged on their knees, then two baskets which they hid under their legs; lastly she climbed on to the seat beside old Simon, and wrapped herself in a big covering which concealed her entirely. The concierge and his wife came to shut the gate, and wished them a good journey; they received the last orders about the luggage, which was to follow in a wagon, and a start was made.

Old Simon, the coachman, with his head lowered and his back rounded beneath the rain, vanished completely in his three-caped box-coat. The moan-

ing gusts beat against the windows, inundated the road.

The barouche, driven at full trot by the pair of horses, quickly descended to the quay, passed along the line of big ships, whose masts, yards and ropes stood gloomily prominent and dripping against the sky, like bare trees; then it entered the long boulevard of Mont Riboudet.

They soon began to drive through the country; and, from time to time, a drenched willow, with its branches hanging limply like the limbs of a corpse, was vaguely outlined through a fog of water. The horses' hoofs clattered, and the four wheels resembled suns of mud.

The party was silent; their spirits seemed as much dampened as the ground. The Baroness leant back and shut her eyes. The Baron gazed with a gloomy eye at the monotonous, wet landscape. Rosalie, with a parcel on her knees, was dreaming with the animal reverie of the common people. But Jeanne felt herself reviving beneath the warm downpour, like a confined plant which has just been placed in the open air; and the density of her joy sheltered her heart from sadness like leafage. Although she did not speak, she longed to sing, to thrust her hand outside in order to fill it with water for drinking; and she rejoiced at being carried along at full trot, at seeing the dreariness of the landscape, and feeling herself under shelter, in the midst of the deluge.

And under the violent rainpour the glistening crippers of the two animals exhaled a mist of steam.

The Baroness gradually went to sleep. Her face,

which was framed by six curls, sank little by little, gently supported by the three great waves of her neck, whose final undulations were lost in the open sea of her chest. Her head, which was raised by each inspiration, fell duly back; her cheeks were puffed out, whilst a resounding snore passed between her half-open lips. Her husband leant over to her, and gently placed in her hands, which were crossed on her ample lap, a small leather pocket-book.

The touch awoke her; and she looked at the object with the dull look the torpor of interrupted sleep. The pocket-book fell and opened. Gold and bank-notes were scattered all over the carriage. She woke up altogether; and her daughter gaily gave vent to a burst of laughing.

The Baron picked up the money, and placing it on her knees: "This, my dear, is all that's left of my farm at Életot. I sold it to get Les Peuples repaired. We shall often reside there now."

She reckoned 6,400 francs, and quietly put them in her pocket.

It was the ninth farm thus sold, out of thirty-one left them by their parents. But they still had about 20,000 livres a year from property which, well-managed, would have easily returned 30,000.

Since they lived simply, this income would have sufficed, if there had not been in the house an ever-open, bottomless pit—namely, their prodigal generosity. It drained the money in their hands, even as the sun drains the water from marshes. It melted, fled, vanished. How? Nobody knew. One of them was always saying: "I don't know

how it happened, but I've spent 100 francs to-day, without buying anything especial."

Anyhow, their readiness to give was one of the great happinesses of their lives, and they understood each other on this point in a fine and touching manner.

Jeanne asked: "Is my château beautiful now?"

The Baron answered gaily: "You will see, my dear."

But gradually the violence of the storm was diminishing; presently it was only a kind of mist, a very fine dust of flickering rain. The arch of the clouds seemed to rise, to whiten; and suddenly a long, slanting sunbeam fell on the fields through a gap one could not see.

And, the clouds having broken up, the blue foundation of the heavens appeared; next, the rift grew larger, like a veil that is being torn, and a beautiful pure sky of a clear deep azure spread over the world.

A fresh, sweet breeze blew, like a happy sigh of the earth; and as they passed gardens or woods, they sometimes heard the bright song of a bird drying its wings.

Evening was at hand. Everyone in the carriage, except Jeanne, was asleep. They had twice stopped at inns to breathe the horses, and give them a little oats and water.

The sun had set; bells were ringing in the distance. In a small village lamps were lighted, and the heavens also were illuminated with a swarm of stars. Now and then lighted houses appeared, piercing the darkness with their rays; and suddenly, behind a hill, through branches of fir-trees,

rose the moon, red, enormous, and as if benumbed with sleep.

It was so mild that the windows remained lowered. Jeanne, exhausted by her dreams, satiated with happy visions, was now sleeping. The numbness caused by remaining long in one position sometimes awoke her; she then looked out, saw in the bright night the trees of a farm flying by, or some cows lying about in a field, who would raise their heads Then she tried a new position, tried to continue the beginning of a dream; but the incessant rolling of the carriage filled her ears, wearied her brain, and she closed her eyes, feeling her mind to be as knocked up as her body.

At length they stopped. Men and women stood before the doors with lamps in their hands. They had arrived. Jeanne, suddenly awakened, quickly sprang out. The Baron and Rosalie, lighted by a farmer, almost carried the Baroness in. She was altogether tired out, moaning in her pain, and continually repeating in a low, feeble voice: "Oh! my goodness! my poor children!" She did not want anything to drink or eat, and went to bed, where she immediately fell asleep

Jeanne and the Baron had a *tête-à-tête* supper.

They smiled when they looked at one another, and took one another's hands across the table; finally, both filled with a childlike joy, they set about visiting the repaired manor-house.

It was one of those high, vast Norman residences, partly farm, partly château, which are built of white stone that has become grey, and are spacious enough to lodge an army in.

An immense hall divided the house in two and crossed it from end to end, its great doors opening on the two fronts. A double staircase seemed to bestride this entrance, leaving the centre empty, and joining its two flights of stairs at the first floor after the fashion of a bridge.

On the ground floor, on the right, you entered the immense drawing-room, hung with leafy tapestry in which birds disported themselves. All the furniture, which was in tapestry to the minutest detail, was in illustration of Fontaine's Fables; and Jeanne felt a pleasurable quiver when she lighted on a chair she had liked as quite a child, which represented the story of the Fox and the Stork.

Next to the drawing-room was the library, full of old books, and two other disused rooms; on the left were the newly-wainscoted dining-room, the linen room, the pantry, the kitchen, and a small room containing a bath.

A corridor ran the length of the whole first floor. The ten doors of the ten rooms opened on to it. Quite at the end, on the right, was Jeanne's room. They entered it. The Baron had just had it newly furnished, by simply making use of hangings and furniture which had remained unemployed in the lumber-rooms.

Some exceedingly old Flemish tapestry peopled the room with strange personages.

Presently, on perceiving her bed, the young woman uttered cries of joy. At the four corners, four big oaken birds, quite black and glistening with wax, supported the bed, and appeared to be its guardians. The sides represented two large

garlands of sculptured flowers and fruit; and the four bedposts, which were finely fluted and terminated in Corinthian capitals, sustained a cornice of entwined roses and cupids.

It rose up monumentally, and was yet perfectly graceful, in spite of the sombreness of the wood embrowned by time.

The counterpane and canopy glittered like two skies. They were made of an old, dark blue silk, starred in places with big fleurs-de-lis embroidered in gold.

When Jeanne had thoroughly admired it, she raised her light and examined the tapestry to find out the subject.

A young nobleman and a young lady, dressed in green, red and yellow, in the strangest fashion, were talking under a blue tree on which white fruit was ripening. A large white rabbit was nibbling at a little grey grass.

Just above the figures, in a conventional distance, you saw five little round houses with pointed roofs, and up at the top, almost in the sky, a perfectly red windmill.

Large flowers were everywhere depicted.

The two other panels much resembled the first, except that you saw issuing from the houses four little fellows dressed like Flemings, who raised their arms to heaven in mark of extreme amazement and wrath.

But the last tapestry represented a drama. The young man stretched out near the rabbit, which was still browsing, seemed dead. The young lady, gazing at him, pierced her breast with a sword, and the fruit of the tree had become black.

Jeanne was about to give up trying to understand, when she discovered in a corner a microscopic animal, which the rabbit, had it lived, could have swallowed like a blade of grass. And yet it was a lion.

Then she recognized the misfortunes of Pyramus and Thisbe; and, although she smiled at the simplicity of the designs, she felt happy at being enclosed in the same room with this love adventure, which would always appeal to her idea of cherished hopes, and would fill her every night in her dreams with its ancient and legendary tenderness.

The rest of the furniture combined the most diverse styles. It was furniture of the kind that each generation leaves in the family, and which turns old houses into a species of museums, where everything is jumbled together. A superb Louis XIV. chest of drawers, bound with shining brass, was flanked by two Louis XV. arm-chairs, which were still covered with brocaded silk. A rose-wood writing-desk faced the mantelpiece, on which stood an Empire clock under a glass.

It took the shape of a bronze bee-hive, hanging on four marble columns over a garden of gilt flowers. A slender pendulum, coming out of the hive through a long slit, was continually swinging a small enamel-winged bee over the flower-garden.

The dial was of painted china, and was inserted in the side of the hive.

It struck eleven. The Baron kissed his daughter, and retired to his own room.

Then Jeanne went to bed, reluctantly.

She gave a last look at her room, and then put out the candle. But to the left of the bed, whose

head was against the wall, was a window, through which a flood of moonlight entered, casting a pool of light on the ground.

It was palely reflected on the walls, mildly caressing the motionless loves of Pyramus and Thisbe.

Through the other window, opposite her feet, Jeanne perceived a large tree bathed in soft light. She turned on her side, and closed her eyes; then, after some time, opened them again.

She thought she felt herself still being shaken by the jolting of the carriage, whose rumbling went on in her brain. At first she remained without stirring, hoping that the resting would at last induce sleep; but the impatience of her mind soon invaded her whole body.

She had twitchings in the legs, and a growing feverishness. So she got up, and, bare of foot and arm, in her long chemise which made her look like a ghost, she crossed the pool of light on the floor, opened the window and looked out.

The night was so clear that you could see things as if it were day, and the young girl recognized all the country she had loved in her early childhood.

First of all, opposite her, was a big lawn, yellow as butter in the moonlight. Two giant trees rose up in front of the château, a plane-tree to the north, a lime-tree to the south.

Quite at the end of the large expanse of grass, a small thicket ended the estate, which was protected from sea hurricanes by five rows of ancient elms twisted, worn away, torn, and sloped like a roof by the ever-raging sea-wind.

This species of park was bounded on the right and left by two long avenues of huge poplars—

called " peuples " in Normandy—which separated the residence of the Squire from the two neighbouring farms, one of which was occupied by the Couillard family, the other by the Martin family.

These " peuples " had given their name to the château. Beyond this enclosure stretched a vast uncultivated plain, covered with furze, where the wind whistled and galloped day and night. Then the coast suddenly fell to a cliff a hundred metres high, precipitous and white, bathing its feet in the waves.

Jeanne gazed into the distance at the long watery surface of the billows that seemed to sleep beneath the stars.

In the peacefulness following the absence of the sun, the earth was giving forth all its odours. A jasmine, clinging about the lower windows, continuously exhaled its penetrating breath, which mingled with the subtler smell of the budding leaves. Gentle gusts swept by, bringing the strong savour of sea air.

The young woman abandoned herself at first to the happiness of breathing; and the repose of the country calmed her like a fresh bath.

All the animals that wake when evening comes, and hide their obscure lives in the tranquillity of night, filled the half-darkness with a silent restlessness. Large birds, uttering no sound, fled through the air like spots, like shadows; the humming of invisible insects reached the ear; there were noiseless races over the dewy grass or the sand of deserted roads.

A few melancholy frogs alone croaked up to the moon with their short, monotonous croak.

It seemed to Jeanne that her heart was expanding, full of murmurs like this clear evening, swarming suddenly with a thousand roving desires, like the animals of the night whose quiverings surrounded her. Some affinity united her to this living poetry; and the soft whiteness of the night she felt to be pervaded by superhuman ecstasies, to palpitate with indescribable hopes, something like a breath of happiness.

And she started dreaming of love.

Love! For two years it had been filling her with the increasing anxiety of its approach. Now she was free to love; she had only to meet—him!

What would he be like? She did not exactly know, and did not even ask herself the question. *He* would be the *he*, that was all.

She only knew she would worship him with all her soul, and he would cherish her with all his strength. They would walk together on evenings like this beneath the luminous sparks that fell from the stars. They would go, hand in hand, pressing against one another, hearing their hearts beat, feeling the warmth of their shoulders, mingling their love with the soft clearness of summer nights, united to such an extent that they would easily penetrate each other's most secret thoughts by the mere power of their tenderness.

And that would go on indefinitely, amid the calm of an indestructible affection.

And she suddenly seemed to feel him there—close to her; and a vague shiver of sensuality quickly ran from head to foot. She clasped her arms against her breast, with an unconscious movement, as if to embrace her dream; and over

her lips, turned towards the unknown, something passed that made her nearly faint, as if the breath of spring had given her a kiss of love.

Suddenly, down below, on the road behind the château, she heard the sound of footsteps in the night. And in the transport of her love-distracted soul, in the rapture of faith in the impossible, in providential chance, in divine presentiments, in the romantic combinations of destiny, she thought: "If it were he!" She listened anxiously to the regular tread of the walker, sure that he was going to stop at the gate to demand hospitality.

When he had passed, she felt sad, as if she had been deceived. But she understood the exaltation of her hope, and smiled at her folly.

Then, as she was a little calmer, she let her mind float on the current of a more rational reverie, seeking to pierce the future, building the scaffold of her life.

She would live here with him, in this quiet château which dominated the sea. She would doubtless have two children, a son for him, a daughter for herself. And she saw them running on the grass between the plane and the lime-tree, whilst the father and mother would follow them with enraptured eyes, exchanging looks full of passion above their heads.

And she remained a long, long time in such reverie, whilst the moon, finishing its journey across the sky, was about to vanish in the sea. The air was growing fresher. The horizon was paling in the east. A cock crew in the farm on the right; others replied in the farm on the left. Their harsh voices appeared to come from a great distance

through the enclosure of the poultry-houses; and in the immense vault of the heavens, which had gradually whitened, the stars were disappearing.

A bird twittered somewhere. Warbling, timid at first, came from the leaves; then it grew bolder, became vibrant, joyous, and spread from branch to branch, from tree to tree.

Jeanne suddenly felt herself in a bright light; and, raising her head which she had hidden in her hands, she closed her eyes, dazzled by the splendour of the dawn.

A mountain of purple clouds, partly hidden behind the big poplar alley, cast gleams of blood over the awakened earth.

And slowly, breaking through the glowing clouds, steeping in fire the trees, the plains, the ocean, the whole horizon, appeared the immense flaming globe.

And Jeanne felt herself becoming mad with happiness. A delirious joy, an infinite tenderness filled her swooning heart in the presence of the splendour of things. It was her sun! her dawn! the beginning of her life! the rising of her hopes! She stretched her arms towards the radiant space, with a desire of embracing the sun; she wanted to speak, to utter something divine like this daybreak; but she remained paralyzed in impotent enthusiasm. Then, laying her forehead in her hands, she felt her eyes fill with tears, and she cried in sheer delight.

When she lifted her head, the magnificent scenery of daybreak had already disappeared. She felt calmed down, and rather tired, as if she had a chill. Without shutting the window, she threw herself

on the bed, mused a few minutes longer, and went into so deep a sleep that at eight o'clock she did not hear her father's calls, and only woke up when he came into her room.

He wanted to show her the improvements in the château, *her* château.

The façade which gave on to the interior of the grounds was separated from the road by a huge courtyard planted with apple-trees. This road, called the parish road, ran between the enclosures of the peasants, and joined, a half a league further on, the high road from Havre to Fécamp.

A straight lane led from the wooden fence to the steps of the house. The out-houses, which were small buildings made of sea-flint and thatched, ran parallel to the two sides of the court, along the ditches of the two farms.

The roofings had been newly repaired; all the wood-work had been restored, the walls seen to, the rooms retapestried, and the whole inside repainted. And on the old, decaying manor-house, the silver-white new shutters, and the fresh plastering of its grey, grand façade, looked like stains.

The other façade, on to which one of Jeanne's windows opened, looked out upon the distant sea over the thicket and the wall of elms, mutilated by the wind.

Jeanne and the Baron, arm-in-arm, went over everything, without omitting a single corner; afterwards they strolled up and down the long avenues of poplars which enclosed what was called the park. The grass had grown under the trees, spreading its green carpet. The thicket at the end was charming, with its little winding paths separ-

ated by barriers of leaves. A hare darted out on a sudden, which frightened Jeanne; then it ran down the slope, and hid itself in the sea-marshes near the cliff.

After breakfast, as Madame Adélaïde, who was still knocked up, declared she was going to rest, the Baron proposed to go down to Yport.

They set off, first going through the village of Etouvent, in which Les Peuples was situated. Three peasants greeted them as if they had known them all their lives.

They entered the sloping woods that descend to the sea, following a winding valley.

Soon appeared the village of Yport. Some women, who sat on the thresholds of their houses, mending clothes, looked at them as they passed. The steep street, which had a kennel in the middle, and heaps of rubbish piled up before the doors, exhaled a strong smell of brine. The brown nets, in parts of which were fish scales gleaming like bits of silver, were drying against the doors of the huts, whence issued the odours of numerous families pigging together in a single room.

A few pigeons were looking for food by the side of the gutter.

Jeanne gazed at it all; it seemed to her as strange and new as theatre scenery.

But suddenly, turning a wall, she saw the sea, dark blue and smooth, stretching to the horizon.

Opposite the beach they stopped to look round. Sails, white as birds' wings, were passing in the offing. The huge cliff towered up on the right and on the left. A sort of cape stopped the sight on one side, whilst on the other the line of coast was

indefinitely prolonged till it became indistinguishable.

A harbour and some houses could be seen in one of the neighbouring bays, and some small waves that fringed the sea with foam, rolled on the beach with a slight noise.

The Normandy boats, hauled up on the shingle-slope, lay on their sides, offering the sun to their round cheeks polished with tar. A few fishermen were getting them ready for the evening tide.

A sailor came up with fish, and Jeanne bought a brill, which she wanted to carry back to Les Peuples herself.

Then the man offered his services for boating excursions, repeating his name again and again, so as to make it stick in their memories: "Lastique, Joséphin Lastique."

The Baron promised not to forget.

They started back to the château.

As Jeanne was tired by the large fish, she thrust her father's stick into its gills, and they each took an end. Gaily they climbed the hill, chatting like two children, with their faces to the wind and their eyes bright, whilst the brill, which gradually wearied their arms, swept the grass with its fat tail.

CHAPTER II

A CHARMING, free life began for Jeanne. She read, mused, and rambled by herself in the neighbourhood. She would wander with slow steps along the roads, her mind given over to reverie; or she would skip down the small winding valleys whose ridges wore a fleece of gorse-flower, like a golden cope. Their strong, sweet smell, heightened by the heat, intoxicated her like a perfumed wine, and her mind was soothed by the distant sound of billows breaking on the beach

A languor overcame her at times and she would throw herself on the thick grass of a hill-slope; and at times, when she suddenly, at the turning of a valley, caught sight, through a funnel of turf, of a triangle of blue sea glittering in the sun, with a sail on the horizon, an excess of joy overpowered her, as if at the mysterious approach of happiness hovering over her

A love of solitude developed in her amid the sweetness of the fresh country, and the calm of the rounded horizons; and she would remain so long sitting on the top of the hills that small wild rabbits would touch her feet as they ran past.

She often used to take runs on the cliff, exhilarated by the light air of the downs, quivering with an exquisite enjoyment of moving without fatigue, like the fish in the sea or the swallows in the air.

Everywhere she sowed memories, just as one sows seed in the ground, those memories the roots of which endure till death. It seemed to her that she cast a little of her heart into all the folds of those valleys.

She was passionately fond of bathing. She swam till she was out of sight, being strong and bold and unconscious of danger. She felt at ease in the cold, clear, blue water which balanced and bore her up. When she was far from shore, she would turn on her back, her arms crossed on her breast, her eyes lost in the deep blue of the sky, which would be swiftly crossed by a flight of swallows or the white outlines of a sea-bird. She could hear no other sound than the distant murmur of the waves on the beach, and a vague, but confused, almost inaudible sound of the shore gliding over the undulating waves. And then Jeanne changed her position, and, in a delirium of joy, would utter shrill cries, striking the water with her hands.

When she sometimes adventured too far, a boat would go out for her.

She used to return to the château pale with hunger, but light-hearted, brisk, with a smile on her lips and her eyes full of happiness.

The Baron, for his part, was contemplating some big agricultural undertakings; he wanted to make experiments, organize improvements, try new implements, and acclimatize foreign plants; and he passed part of the day talking with the peasants, who shook their heads and showed their disbelief in his experiments.

Often too he had a sail with the Yport fishermen.

When he had visited the caves, the springs, and the rocks of the neighbourhood, he wanted to fish like an ordinary seaman.

On windy days, when the fishing-boats under swelling sails ride over the backs of the waves, bent over to the edge of the water by the trailing of the great mackerel-nets, he would hold in his hand, (which trembled with anxious hope,) a small line which you might feel quivering as soon as a hooked fish began to struggle.

He used to go out in the moonlight to take up the nets set the night before. He loved to hear the mast creak, and to breathe the fresh-blowing night wind; and, after tacking a long time to find the buoys, guided by a ridge of rocks, the roof of a belfry, and the Fécamp light-house, he would delight in gazing without moving at the first fires of the rising sun, under which the shiny backs of the broad fan-shaped rays and the fat bellies of the turbots gleamed as they lay on the deck of the boat.

At every meal, he talked with enthusiasm about his excursions; and his wife in turn told him how many times she had walked up and down the big poplar-alley on the right near the Couillard's farm, the other one not having enough sunlight.

As she had been advised to "take exercise," she eagerly took to walking. When the chilliness of night had dispersed, she came down, resting on Rosalie's arm, covered with a cloak and two shawls, her head stuffed in a black hood which again was hidden by a red scarf.

Then she would always start on an interminable journey in a straight line from the corner of the

château to the first shrubs of the thicket. Her left foot, which was rather heavier than the other, dragged along, and had already traced, on the whole length of her walk, two dusty furrows, the one where she started, the other where she returned, and the grass had died there. She had had a bench placed at each end of her path; and every five minutes she would stop, saying to the poor patient servant on whom she leant: "Let us sit down, my girl; I'm rather tired."

And at every stoppage she would leave something on one of the seats, now the scarf that covered her head, now one shawl and then the other, then the hood, and then the cloak; and all this, which she left at the two ends of the alley, made two big bundles which Rosalie carried back on her free arm, when they went in to lunch.

And in the afternoon the Baroness walked again in a feebler way, with longer rests, and even dozed for an hour at times on a couch that was wheeled outside.

She called that taking "her exercise," just as she talked about "my hypertrophy."

A doctor, who had been consulted ten years before, because she suffered from feelings of stifling, had mentioned hypertrophy. Since then the word, whose meaning she hardly knew, was fixed in her memory. She would obstinately make the Baron, Jeanne and Rosalie sound her heart which nobody could hear beating, because it was buried beneath the obesity of her breast; but she energetically refused to be examined by any fresh doctor, for fear he might discover she had some other disease; and she spoke of "her" hypertrophy on every

occasion and so frequently that it appeared the affection was special to her, and belonged to her as a unique thing to which no one else could lay claim.

The Baron would mention "my wife's hypertrophy," and Jeanne "mamma's hypertrophy," as if they were talking about her dress, her hat or her umbrella.

She had been very pretty in youth and slenderer than a reed. After having waltzed in arms of all the uniforms of the Empire, she had read "Corinne" which made her cry; and since then she had remained, as it were, stamped with that novel.

As her waist grew in size, her soul became more and more impulsively poetic; and when corpulence confined her to an arm-chair, her imagination rambled through tender adventures whose heroine she believed herself to be. She had preferences for some, which she always introduced into her reveries, even as a musical-box, on the handle being turned, repeats incessantly the same tune. All the languorous romances, in which mention is made of prisoners and swallows, infallibly brought tears to her eyes; and she even liked certain obscene songs of Béranger because of the regrets they express.

She often remained for hours without motion, absorbed in day-dreams; and it infinitely delighted her to live at Les Peuples, because it lent a landscape to the romances of her soul, the surrounding woods, the deserted downs, and the neighbourhood of the sea, recalling Walter Scott's novels, which she had been reading for some months.

On rainy days she stayed shut up in her room

and looked over what she termed her "relics." These consisted of all her old letters, the letters of her father and mother, the letters of the Baron when she was betrothed to him, and others.

She kept them in a mahogany writing-desk with copper sphinxes at the corners; and she would say in a special tone of voice: "Rosalie, my girl, bring me the souvenir-drawer."

The maid opened the desk, took the drawer, and placed it on a chair by the side of her mistress, who began slowly to read the letters, one by one, shedding a tear on them now and then.

Jeanne was sometimes Rosalie's substitute and accompanied her mother's walks, listening to her reminiscences of her childhood. The young woman recognized herself in those old stories, and was astonished at the similarity of their thoughts, at the kinship of their longings; because everybody fancies he was the first to have trembled beneath a number of sensations which made the hearts of the first human beings quiver and will have the same effect on the last men and the last women on earth.

Their slow strolling harmonized with the slowness of the story which was sometimes interrupted for a few seconds by the old lady's breathlessness; and then Jeanne's imagination, leaping beyond the commencement of her mother's story, darted out towards the future which was peopled with joys, and she revelled in the expectation of them.

One afternoon, as they were resting on the bench at the bottom of the alley, they suddenly saw coming towards them a fat priest.

He greeted them from a distance, assumed a

smiling look, bowed again when he was three paces away, and exclaimed: "Well, Madame la Baronne, how are we getting on?" It was the curé.

The old lady, who was born in a century of philosophers and educated in the time of the Revolution by a father who believed in little, hardly ever went to church, although she liked priests through a sort of feminine religious instinct.

She had entirely forgotten the Abbé Picot, her curé, and reddened as she caught sight of him. She apologized for not having anticipated his visit. But the worthy man did not seem at all offended; he looked at Jeanne, complimented her on her good looks, sat down, put his hat on his knees, and wiped his forehead. He was very stout, very red, and sweated freely. He was continually pulling out of his pocket a huge check handkerchief, drenched in perspiration, and passed it over his face and neck; but hardly had the moist linen been returned to the black depths of his dress, than fresh drops of sweat issued on his skin, and falling on the cassock which rebounded from his belly, converted the flying road-dust into small round stains.

He was lively, a regular country priest, tolerant, talkative and straightforward. He told stories, spoke about the country-people, and did not seem to have observed that his two parishioners had not yet been to Mass, for the Baroness reconciled her indolence with her vague beliefs, whilst Jeanne was too happy to be free from the convent where she had been sickened with pious ceremonies.

The Baron appeared. His pantheistic religion

made him indifferent to dogma. He was amiable to the Abbé, whom he knew by sight, and kept him to dinner

The priest knew how to please them, thanks to the unconscious astuteness which the management of souls gives the most mediocre men called by the hazard of events to exercise any power over their kind.

The Baroness petted him, attracted perhaps by one of those affinities that draw similar natures together, the fat man's red face and short breath accorded with her own panting corpulence

About dessert time he was as brisk as a curé on a holiday, with the familiar *laisser aller* that belongs to the end of a congenial repast

And suddenly he exclaimed, as if a happy thought had crossed his mind "Why, I have a new parishioner to introduce to you, M le Vicomte de Lamare!"

The Baroness, who had all the heraldry of the province at her finger-tips, asked: "Is he of the family of Lamare de L'Eure?"

The priest bowed "Yes, Madame, he is the son of the Vicomte Jean de Lamare, who died last year." Then Madame Adélaide, who loved the nobility above everything, put a crowd of questions, and learnt that the young man, after selling the family château and paying his father's debts, had made himself a small *pied-à-terre* on one of the three farms belonging to him in the parish of Etouvent The property represented in all from five to six thousand livres income; but the Vicomte was economical by nature and prudent, and intended to live two or three years quietly in his

modest house, so as to save up enough to go into society and marry advantageously, without contracting debts or mortgaging his farms

The curé added: "He is a very charming fellow; and so steady, so quiet! But he has hardly any amusement in the country."

The Baron said: "Bring him to us, M. l'Abbé; it might be a distraction to him now and then."

And they talked about other things.

When they went into the drawing-room, after taking coffee, the priest asked leave for a stroll in the garden, as he was in the habit of taking a little exercise after meals. The Baron accompanied him. They walked slowly along the white façade of the chateau and then returned. Their shadows, the one thin, the other round and covered, as it were, with a mushroom, wandered sometimes in front of them, sometimes behind, according as they went towards the moon or turned their backs on it. The curé chewed a sort of cigarette he had pulled out of his pocket. He explained the use of it with the frankness of a country man: "I find it good for my digestion, which is rather weak."

Then suddenly gazing at the sky, through which the bright moon was travelling, he declared: "You never weary of that spectacle."

And he went back to take leave of the ladies.

CHAPTER III

THE following Sunday, the Baroness and Jeanne attended Mass, urged by a delicate feeling of deference for their curé.

Afterwards they waited for him to ask him to lunch for Thursday. He came out of the vestry with a tall, elegant young man who familiarly gave him his arm. When he saw the two women, he cried with a gesture of joyful surprise: "How lucky! Permit me, Madame la Baronne and Mlle. Jeanne, to introduce to you your neighbour, M. le Vicomte de Lamare."

The Vicomte bowed, mentioned the wish he had already long felt to make the ladies' acquaintance, and began to talk easily, like a man *comme il faut*, a man of the world. He had one of those faces about which women dream, and which all men dislike. Black, curly hair shaded his smooth, bronzed forehead; and large eyebrows, which were so regular that they might have been false, lent a deep, tender look to his dark eyes whose whites seemed a little tinted with blue.

The thick, long lashes gave his eyes the passionate eloquence that thrills the haughty beauty in the drawing-room, and makes the working-girl, carrying a basket, turn round in the street.

The languorous charm of his eyes made one

believe in the depth of his thought and gave importance to his least word.

His thick, glossy, soft beard hid a jaw which was rather too heavy.

They parted after many compliments.

Two days later, M. de Lamare paid his first visit.

He arrived just when they were trying a rustic bench which had been placed that very morning beneath the big plane-tree opposite the drawing-room windows. The Baron wanted another to be placed under the lime-tree, as a pendant; the Baroness, who disliked symmetry, did not want it. The Vicomte was consulted and was of the Baroness's opinion.

Then he spoke about the country, which he asserted to be very "picturesque," he had, in the course of his solitary walks, found many entrancing "sites." Now and then his eyes met Jeanne's, as if by chance; and she was filled with a singular sensation by those sudden looks, quickly turned away, which expressed a caressing admiration and an awakened sympathy.

M. de Lamare's father, who had died the year before, had known an intimate friend of M. de Cultaux, the Baroness's father; and the discovery of the acquaintanceship led to an endless talk about marriages, dates, and relationships. The Baroness achieved marvellous feats of memory, in connection with the ancestors and descendants of other families, traversing the complicated labyrinth of genealogies without ever losing the thread.

"Tell me, Vicomte, have you heard of the

Saunoys de Varfleur? Gontran, the eldest son, had married a Mlle. de Coursil, a Coursil-Courville, and the younger married one of my cousins, Mlle. de la Roche-Aubert, who was related to the Crisanges. Now, M. de Crisange was my father's intimate friend and must have known yours also."

"Yes, Madame. Wasn't it the M. de Crisange who emigrated, and whose son went to the bad?"

"Yes. He had asked my aunt to marry him, after the death of her husband the Comte d'Eretry; but she refused him because he took snuff. Do you know, by the way, what's become of the Viloises? They left Touraine about 1813, after a reverse of fortune, to settle down in Auvergne; and I haven't heard of them since."

"I believe, Madame, that the old marquis died of a fall from his horse, leaving one daughter, married to an Englishman, and the other to a certain Bassolle, said to be a rich merchant, who had seduced her."

And names they had heard and remembered from childhood in the conversations of their old parents were recalled. And the marriages of these specially noble families assumed in their minds the importance of great public events. They spoke of people they had never seen, as if they knew them well; and those people in other countries spoke of them in the same way; and they felt themselves intimat at a distance, almost friends, almost relations, owing to the mere fact of belonging to the same class, the same caste, of being of equal blood.

The Baron, who was rather rough by nature and had received an education that did not at all harmonize with the beliefs and prejudices of people

of his rank, hardly knew the neighbouring families and asked the Vicomte about them.

M. de Lamare replied: "Oh, there is not much of the nobility in the *arrondissement*," in the same tone in which he would have stated that there were few rabbits on the downs; and he gave details. Three families alone came sufficiently within the radius: the Marquis de Coutelier, a kind of head of the Norman aristocracy; the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville, people of excellent birth, who, however, kept rather to themselves; lastly, the Comte de Fourville, a kind of fire-eater who was said to be killing his wife with chagrin and lived a sporting life in his château, La Vrillette, which was built on a lake.

Some parvenus, who associated with them, had bought property here and there. The Vicomte did not know them.

He took leave; and his last glance was at Jeanne, as if he would have addressed to her an especial, more heartfelt and tender adieu.

The Baroness thought him charming and particularly *comme il faut*. The Baron rejoined: "Yes, certainly, he is very well-bred."

He was invited to dinner the next week. He then came regularly.

He generally arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon, joined the Baroness in "her avenue," and offered her his arm for "her exercise." When Jeanne had not gone out, she supported the Baroness on the other side, and the three walked slowly from one end of the long path to the other in a straight line, continually to and fro. He hardly spoke to the young lady. But his eyes,

which seemed like black velvet, often met Jeanne's, which might have been of blue agate.

Both of them went several times down to Yport with the Baron.

One evening, when they were on the beach, old Lastique came up to them, and, without leaving hold of his pipe, whose absence would perhaps have caused more astonishment than the disappearance of his nose, he observed: "With this wind, M'sieu l'Baron, you might easily go to Étretat and back to-morrow."

Jeanne clasped her hands: "Oh, papa, won't you?" The Baron turned to M. de Lamare:

"Will you come, Vicomte? We should have lunch there."

And the trip was at once decided on.

Jeanne was up at dawn. She waited for her father, who was slower in dressing, and then they started to walk in the dew, first crossing the level ground, and presently the wood, which resounded with the songs of birds. The Vicomte and old Lastique were sitting on a capstan.

Two other sailors helped at starting. Putting their shoulders to the sides, they shoved with all their strength. They moved with difficulty on the level part of the beach. Lastique slipped under the keel rollers of greased wood, and then, taking his place again, drawled out his interminable "Phée hop!" which was to make them shove together.

But when they came to the slant, the boat suddenly started off and slid over the round pebbles with the loud noise of torn canvass. It stopped short near the foam of the little waves, and they

all took their places on the seats; then the two sailors, who remained on shore, pushed it into the sea.

A light, steady breeze, coming from the offing, was ruffling and wrinkling the surface of the water. The sail was hoisted, bellied out a bit, and the barque moved quietly, hardly rocked by the sea.

At first they sailed right out. Towards the horizon, the sky as it curved mingled with the ocean. Towards the shore, the high steep cliff cast a deep shadow at its foot, and sun-steeped grass-slopes indented it here and there. Behind them, brown sails were leaving the white pier of Fécamp, and before them was a rounded rock of strange shape, with a hole through it, which had something like the appearance of a huge elephant dipping its trunk in the billows. It was the small harbour of Étretat.

Jeanne, holding to the side with one hand, rather dizzied by the rocking of the water, gazed into the distance; and it seemed to her that three things only were really beautiful in the world; light, space and the sea.

No one spoke. Old Lastique, who held the tiller and sheet, had a swig from time to time from a bottle hidden under his seat; and he smoked, without stopping, his pipe-stump, which appeared inextinguishable. A slender thread of blue smoke was always issuing from it, whilst another quite similar escaped from the corner of his mouth. And you never saw the sailor re-light the clay bowl, which was blacker than ebony, or re-fill it with tobacco. He sometimes took it in his hand, removed it from

his lips, and, from the same corner whence the smoke issued, he would eject into the sea a long jet of brown saliva.

The Baron, sitting in the bows, looked after the sail, like a seaman. Jeanne and the Vicomte were side by side, both of them rather uneasy. An unknown force compelled their eyes to meet, and they raised them at the same moment, as if they had been moved by some affinity; for there hovered already between them that subtle, vague tenderness, which springs up so quickly between two young persons, when the young man is not ugly and the young woman is pretty. They felt happy at being near one another, perhaps because they were thinking of one another.

The sun was climbing up as if to contemplate from a greater height the vast sea spread out beneath it; but the sea played coquette and covered itself with a light mist that veiled it from the sun-beams. It was a transparent, very low, golden haze, which hid nothing, but softened the distances. The sun darted down its flames and melted the shining mist; and when it came in full force, the vapour disappeared; and the sea, smooth as a mirror, began sparkling in the light.

Jeanne, her feelings quite stirred, murmured: "How lovely!" The Vicomte answered: "Oh yes! it's lovely." The serene clearness of the morning awoke, as it were, an echo in their hearts.

And suddenly they made out the great arcades of Étretat, like two legs of the cliff walking in the sea, high enough for ships to sail beneath; whilst a cone of white, pointed rock rose up before the first one.

They reached the shore, and whilst the Baron, getting out first, held the boat to the beach by pulling at a rope, the Vicomte took Jeanne in his arms so as to place her on land without wetting her feet; then they climbed the rough slope of the beach side by side, both of them agitated by the brief embrace, and they suddenly heard old Lastique say to the Baron: "I think they'd make a fine couple."

In a small inn, near the beach, the lunch was delightful. The sea, benumbing their voices and thoughts, had made them silent; the luncheon made them chatter away like children on their holidays.

The simplest things gave them endless amusement.

Old Lastique, as he sat down to table, carefully hid his pipe, which was still smoking, in his cap; and they laughed. A fly, no doubt allured by his red nose, came several times and settled on it; and, when he had chased it away by a blow of his hand which was too slow to catch it, it went and posted itself on a muslin curtain, which many of its sisters had already stained, and it appeared greedily to watch the sailor's shining bottle-nose, for it quickly flew off and installed itself there again.

Every time the insect went on its travels there was a wild burst of laughter; and when the old man, annoyed by its tickling, muttered: "D—n the ——!" Jeanne and the Vicomte cried with laughing, twisting about, gasping, with their napkins on their mouths to prevent themselves from shrieking aloud.

When they had had coffee, Jeanne said: "Suppose we go for a walk." The Vicomte rose up; but the Baron preferred to have a nap in the sunshine on the beach: "You go, my dears, you will find me here again in an hour."

They went straight past a few cottages; and after going by a small château that looked like a big farm, they found themselves in an open valley stretching before them.

The motion of the sea had made them languid, upsetting their usual equilibrium, the keen salt breezes had roused their hunger, and lastly the lunch had dazed them and their merriment had produced enervation. They felt now a bit crazy, with longings to run wildly about the fields. Jeanne heard a singing in her ears, and was agitated by new, swift sensations.

A scorching sun fell on them. On both sides of the road ripe crops were drooping under the heat. Grasshoppers were chirping, numerous as blades of grass, uttering everywhere, amid the corn and the rye and the sea-reeds of the downs, their thin, deafening note.

No other note struck the ear under the torrid sky, which was of a glistening blue, with a tone of yellow as if it were going all at once to become red, like metals when they are placed too near a furnace.

Further on they perceived a little wood on the right and walked there.

A narrow avenue, sunk between two slopes, led beneath great trees, impenetrable to the sun. A kind of mouldy freshness came upon them as they entered, that moisture which sends shivers along

the skin and penetrates the lungs. The grass had vanished, for want of light and fresh air; but the soil was covered with moss.

They went on. "We might sit down a bit here," she said. Two old trees had died, and through a break in the leaves a flood of light fell there, warming the ground, awaking the seeds of grass, dandelion and lianae, and giving birth to little white flowers, delicate as a mist, and foxglove resembling rockets. Butterflies, bees, dumpy hornets, enormous gnats looking like skeleton-flies, a thousand winged insects, red-spotted lady-birds, beetles of greenish sheen, others black with horns, peopled this bright, warm spot hollowed out in the shade chilled by the heavy foliage.

They sat down, their heads in the shade and their feet in the warmth. They gazed at all these swarming little creatures produced by a sun-beam; and Jeanne, moved to tenderness, kept repeating; "How good it is for one! how good the country is! There are moments when I should like to be a fly or a butterfly, to hide myself in the flowers."

They spoke of themselves, their habits, their tastes, in that lower, more intimate tone of voice, in which one makes confidences. He said he was already disgusted with society, weary of his useless life; it was always the same thing; you never met with any truth or sincerity.

Society! she would have liked to live in it; but she was convinced beforehand that it was not as good as the country.

And the nearer their hearts drew to one another, the more ceremoniously they used the words "Monsieur" and "Mademoiselle," and the more

their eyes mutually smiled and their looks blended together; and it seemed to them that a new goodness was entering into them, a larger affection, an interest in a thousand things about which they had never troubled themselves.

They returned; but the Baron had gone on foot to Chambre-aux-Demoiselles, a cave formed in a gap of the cliff; and they waited for him at the inn.

He did not re-appear before five o'clock in the afternoon, after a long walk on the downs.

They embarked again. The boat sailed smoothly, the wind behind it, without any rocking, without any appearance of moving. The breeze came in slow, warm gusts which swelled the sail for a moment, only to let it fall flabbily against the mast the next. The opaque water seemed dead; and the sun, wearied of its ardours, was following its rounded path and slowly nearing the waves.

The numbing effect of the sea again brought silence on the party.

At last Jeanne said: "How I should like to travel!"

The Vicomte replied: "Yes, but it is melancholy to travel alone, there should be at least two to exchange impressions."

She returned reflectively: "It's true—still I like to go for a walk alone—how delicious you feel when you are dreaming quite by yourself!"

He gave her a long look: "Two people can also dream together."

She cast down her eyes. Was it an allusion? Perhaps. She gazed at the horizon as if she would see beyond it; then, in a slow voice: "I should

like to go to Italy—and to Greece—ah, yes! to Greece—and to Corsica! it must be so wild and so beautiful there!"

He preferred Switzerland, because of the chalets and the lakes.

She said: "No, I should like quite fresh countries like Corsica, or countries that are very old and full of memories like Greece. It must be so pleasing to find the traces of those peoples whose history we know from childhood, to visit the places where great things were achieved."

The Vicomte declared, less enthusiastically: "As for me, England attracts me a great deal; it is an exceedingly instructive place."

Then they rattled through the universe, discussing the beauties of every country from the poles to the equator, falling into ecstasies over the imaginary landscapes and improbable ways of life of certain nations like the Chinese or the Laplanders; but they reached the conclusion that the most beautiful country in the world was France, with its temperate climate, fresh in summer and mild in winter, its rich fields, its green forests, its big, calm rivers, and its cult of the fine arts which had existed nowhere else since the great era of Athens.

Then they grew silent.

The sun, which was lower, seemed to be bleeding; and a broad luminous trail, a dazzling pathway invaded the water, from the boundary of the ocean to the wake of the boat.

The last breath of wind died out; every ripple became smooth, and the motionless sail was red. A limitless peace seemed to fill space, and produce silence around this meeting of the elements; whilst,

curving up beneath the sky her glistening, liquid bosom, the sea, like a monstrous bride, awaited the fiery lover who was descending towards her. He hastened his fall, empurpled, as it were, by the desire of their embrace. He joined her; and gradually she devoured him.

Then came a freshness from the horizon; a ripple stirred the moving bosom of the water as if the swallowed orb had uttered to the world a sigh of content.

Twilight was brief; night appeared, studded with stars. Old Lastique took the oars, and they saw that the sea was phosphorescent. Jeanne and the Vicomte, side by side, looked at the moving gleams which the boat left behind it. They were hardly thinking any more, but were, in vague contemplation, breathing in the evening air in a deliciously happy frame of mind; and as Jeanne had a hand resting on the seat, one of her neighbour's fingers touched her skin, as if by accident; she did not move; she was surprised, happy and confused by the light contact.

When she entered her room that evening, she felt strangely moved and so tender in feeling that she was inclined to cry at anything. She looked at her clock, and thought that the little bee throbbed like a heart, a friendly heart; that it would witness her whole life, that it would accompany her joys and sorrows with its quick, regular beat; and she stopped the gilt fly to plant a kiss on its wings. She would have kissed anything. She remembered having put away in the bottom of a drawer an old doll; she looked it out and saw it again with the joy one feels on meeting old friends; and pressing it

against her heart, she covered the painted cheeks and curly hair of the toy with burning kisses.

And as she held it in her arms, she mused.

Was HE the husband promised by a thousand secret voices, whom a sovereignly kind Providence had thus sent on her lifepath? Was he the being created for her, to whom she would devote her existence? Were they two the predestined ones whose affections were to unite and embrace, to mingle indissolubly, to engender LOVE?

She had not yet felt those tumultuous ecstasies of her whole being, those wild raptures, that profound agitation, which she believed to be passion; still, it seemed to her that she was beginning to love him; for she felt sometimes, when she thought of him, as if she were swooning; and she thought of him continually. His presence stirred her heart; she reddened and paled when she met a glance of his, and thrilled when she heard his voice.

She slept very little that night.

Then the agitating desire for love grew upon her every day more and more. She was incessantly putting questions to herself, besides consulting daisies and clouds, or tossing coins.

Now, one evening, her father said to her: "Make yourself beautiful to-morrow morning." She asked: "Why, papa?" He replied: "That's a secret."

And when she came down quite fresh in a light dress next morning, she found the drawing-room table covered with bon-bon boxes; and, on a chair, was a huge bouquet.

A carriage entered the court. On it was "Lérat, Confectioner, Fécamp. Wedding breakfasts";

and Ludivine, with the help of a scullion, took from a sliding door behind the cart a quantity of large flat baskets, which smelt nice.

The Vicomte de Lamare came up. His trousers were stretched and held under little varnished boots, that displayed the smallness of his foot. His long coat, which was tightened at the waist, showed the lace shirt-frill through the opening on the chest; and an expensive cravat, twisted several times about the neck, compelled him to hold high his handsome dark head, which had an air of grave distinction. He had a different look from usual, that peculiar look which dress suddenly lends to the best known faces. Jeanne, astonished, stared as if she had never seen him before; she considered him a perfect nobleman, a *grand seigneur* from head to foot.

He bowed, smiling: "Well, godmother, are you ready?"

She stammered: "But what—what is the matter?"

"You will know soon," said the Baron.

The carriage drew up, and Madame Adélaide came down from her room in great state, on the arm of Rosalie, who appeared so stirred by M. de Lamare's elegance, that the Baron murmured: "I say, Vicomte, I believe our maid finds you to her taste." He reddened to the ears, pretended not to have heard, and, taking hold of the big bouquet, presented it to Jeanne. She took it, more amazed than ever. All four got into the carriage; and Ludivine, the cook, who brought the Baroness some cold soup to sustain her, declared: "Really, Madame, one might imagine it was a wedding."

They got out on reaching Yport, and as they walked through the village, the sailors in their new clothes, in which the folds were visible, came out of their houses, greeted the party, shook the Baron's hand, and began following behind, as in procession.

The Vicomte had offered Jeanne his arm, and marched at the head with her

When they arrived at the church, they halted; and the great silver cross appeared, held upright by a chorister; he came in front of another red and white urchin carrying the urn of holy water with the sprinkler in it.

Then came three old choristers, one of whom limped, then the serpent-player, then the curé, supporting on his bulging stomach the gilded stole. He said good-day with a smile and a nod; then, with half-closed eyes, his lips moving in prayer, his cap pressed down to the nose, he followed his surpliced staff in the direction of the sea.

On the beach a crowd was waiting around a new, garlanded boat. Its mast, sail and ropes were covered with long ribbons which fluttered in the wind, and its name, JEANNE, appeared in gilt letters on the stern.

Old Lastique, the master of this boat which had been built with the Baron's money, went forward to meet the procession. All the men at the same time took off their head-gear together; and a row of nuns, enveloped in large black cloaks, with big folds falling from the shoulder, knelt in a circle at the sight of the cross.

The curé, walking between the two choir boys, went to one end of the boat, whilst at the other,

the three old choristers, looking slovenly in their white garb, with hairy chins, a serious air, and their eyes fixed on their hymn-books, bellowed their loudest into the bright morning air.

Every time they took breath, the serpent-player continued his roaring alone; and his small grey eyes disappeared as he blew out his cheeks. The very skin of his forehead and neck seemed cut off from the flesh, so greatly did he swell himself as he blew.

The motionless, transparent sea appeared to be reverently attending the baptism of its wherry; its wavelets, no higher than a finger, scarcely broke on the beach, with a very faint grating sound. And the big, white sea-gulls passed with extended wings, describing curves in the blue sky; they flew clean away, then returned with a sweeping flight over the kneeling crowd, as if to see what was happening.

But the chant stopped after a five minutes' amen, and the priest gabbled in a thick voice a few Latin words, of which nothing could be distinguished but the sonorous terminations.

Then he walked round the boat, sprinkling it with holy water, and then began to murmur the "Oremus," remaining opposite the godfather and the godmother, who stood without moving, hand in hand.

The young man kept his grave, handsome face impassive, but the young woman, suffocating into a sudden emotion, in a swooning state, began trembling so much that her teeth chattered. The dream, that haunted her now for some time, had suddenly, in a kind of hallucination, taken the

semblance of a reality. There had been talk about a marriage, a priest was there, giving his blessing, whilst men in surplices were chanting prayers; was it not she who was being married?

Did she have a nervous shock in her fingers? Had the obsession of her heart coursed through her veins to the heart of her neighbour? Did he understand, did he guess? was he, like her, attacked by a kind of intoxication of love? or was it merely that he knew by experience no woman could resist him? She all at once observed that he pressed her hand, gently at first, then harder and harder, as if to crush it. And, without changing expression, without anybody noticing it, he said—certainly he said, very distinctly: "Oh, Jeanne! if you wished it, we should be betrothed."

She bent her head with a very slow movement, which perhaps meant "Yes." And the priest, who was still sprinkling holy water, sprinkled a few drops on their fingers.

It was over. The women rose up. The return journey was a stampede. The cross in the choir boy's hands had lost its dignity; it bolted along, oscillating between right and left, or tilted forward, nearly falling on its nose. The curé, who had done praying, galloped behind; the choristers and serpent-player had disappeared down a lane in order the sooner to get undressed; and the sailors hurried on in groups. The same idea was in all their heads; it was, as it were, the smell of cooking; it quickened their steps, and made their mouths water.

An excellent lunch was awaiting them at Les Peuples.

The big table was laid in the court-yard under the apple-trees. Sixty fishermen and peasants took their seats. The Baroness, in the centre, had on either side the two curés of Yport and Les Peuples. The Baron, opposite her, had at his sides the mayor and his wife, a thin old country dame, who greeted everybody all round. Her narrow face was tightly enclosed in her big Norman cap; it looked a regular white-tufted fowl's head, with perfectly round eyes, and an air of continuous astonishment; and she ate in little quick jerks, as if pecking at her plate with her nose.

Jeanne, seated beside the "godfather," was overwhelmed with happiness. She saw nothing, knew nothing, and was silent, her head turned with joy.

She asked him: "What is your Christian name?"

He answered: "Julien. Didn't you know?"

But she did not reply, thinking: "How often I shall repeat that name!"

When the meal was over, the court-yard was left to the sailors, and the Baroness's party proceeded to the other side of the house. The Baroness started her exercise, leaning on the Baron, and escorted by the two priests. Jeanne and Julien went to the thicket, and entered the little leafy paths; and suddenly he seized her hands.

"Tell me, will you be my wife?"

Her head sank; and when he stammered:

"Answer, I implore you!" she slowly raised her eyes to him, and he read the answer in her look.

CHAPTER IV

One morning the Baron came into Jeanne's room before she was up, and sitting at the foot of the bed, said: "M. le Vicomte de Lamare has asked us for your hand."

She longed to hide her face under the bedclothes.

Her father went on: "We have deferred our answer for the moment." She panted, suffocated by emotion. After a minute had gone by, the Baron added, smiling: "We didn't want to do anything without speaking to you about it. Your mother and myself are not opposed to the marriage, but still we don't wish to bind you to it. You are much richer than he, but, when it is a question of lifelong happiness, one should not bother about money. He has no relations; so if you married him, he would be like a son in our family, whilst, in the case of another man, it would be you, our daughter, who would go and live among strangers. The young fellow pleases us. Does he please—you?"

She stammered, blushing to the roots of her hair: "I like him, papa."

And the Baron, gazing right into her eyes, muttered, with a smile: "I rather suspected it, Mademoiselle."

familiarity, that concealed a sort of contemptuous kindness. She was called Lise, and seemed worried by the lively, youthful sound of the name. When it was seen that she did not marry, that doubtless she would never marry, "Lise" was changed to "Lison." Since Jeanne's birth she had become "Aunt Lison," a poor relation, prim, and frightfully timid. Even with her sister and brother-in-law, who nevertheless were fond of her, but with a vague affection composed of an indifferent kindness, an unconscious pity, and a natural benevolence.

Sometimes, when the Baroness was speaking of the distant events of her youth, she would declare, so as to fix a date: "It was at the time of Lison's escapade."

Nothing more was ever said about it; and this "escapade" remained, as it were, enveloped in a fog.

One evening, Lise, who was then twenty, had thrown herself into the water without anybody knowing why. There was nothing in her life or in her manners to lead one to anticipate such madness. She had been fished out half dead; and her relations, raising their arms in indignation, instead of seeking the mysterious cause of the act, had been content with talking about the "escapade," just as they talked about the accident to the horse "Coco," who had broken his leg in a ditch a short while before and had had to be killed.

Since then, Lise, who soon became Lison, was considered weak in the head. The mild contempt with which she inspired her relations slowly infected everybody who came near her. Little Jeanne

herself, with the natural intuition of children, did not trouble about her, never went up to kiss her in bed, never entered her room. Rosalie, who did what was necessary in the room, alone seemed to know where it was.

When Aunt Lison entered the dining-room for lunch, little Jeanne was in the habit of going up and offering her forehead for a kiss; that was all.

If any one wanted to speak with her, a servant was sent for her; and, when she was not there, nobody talked about her, nobody ever thought of her, nobody would ever have had the idea of becoming uneasy and asking: "Why, I haven't seen Lison this morning!"

She had no position in the house; she was one of those beings who remain unknown even to their relations, as it were, unexplored, and whose death makes no gap or emptiness in a house; one of those beings who are unable to enter either into the life, or into the habits, or into the love of those who live beside them.

When the words "Aunt Lison" were uttered, they awoke no affection in any one's mind. It was as if the coffee-pot or the sugar-basin had been mentioned.

She always used to walk with short, quick steps, never made any noise, never knocked against anything, and seemed to give things the property of making no sound. Her hands appeared made of a kind of cotton wool, so lightly and delicately did she handle what she touched.

She arrived about the middle of July, quite upset by the notion of the marriage. She brought with

her a quantity of presents, which, as they came from her, remained almost unperceived.

The day after her arrival, nobody could have observed that she was there.

But an extraordinary emotion was fermenting in her, and her eyes never left the betrothed couple. She busied herself with the trousseau with a peculiar energy, a feverish activity, working like an ordinary dressmaker in her room, where no one came to see her.

She was continually showing the Baroness handkerchiefs she had hemmed herself, and towels on which she had embroidered the initials, with the question: "Do you like it, Adélaïde?" And the Baroness, calmly examining the work, would reply: "Don't give yourself so much trouble, my poor Lison."

Towards the end of the month, after a day of oppressive heat, the moon rose in one of those clear, warm nights that inspire the intoxicating agitations of love, and seem to arouse all the soul's secret poetry. The gentle breezes from the fields blew into the quiet drawing-room. The Baroness and her husband were lazily playing cards in the ring of light which the lamp-shade cast on the table; Aunt Lison, sitting by them, was knitting; and the young couple, leaning at the open window, were gazing at the moonlit garden.

The lime-tree and the plane threw their shadows on the broad lawn, which stretched, pale and shining, as far as the black thicket.

Irresistibly allured by the tender charm of the night, by the misty illumination of the trees and

groves, Jeanne turned to her parents: "Papa, we're going for a stroll on the grass, just there, in front of the house." The Baron, without stopping his game, said: "Go along, my dears," and was again absorbed in his play.

They went out, and began walking slowly on the broad white sward to the little wood at the bottom.

The time passed without their thinking of returning. The Baroness, who was tired, wanted to go up to bed: "We must call in the lovers," she said.

The Baron glanced round the large moon-lit garden, where two shadows were softly wandering.

"Leave them there," he replied; "it is so nice out of doors! Lison will wait up for them, won't you, Lison?"

The old maid raised her restless eyes, and answered in her timid voice: "Certainly, I shall wait for them."

The Baron helped his wife to get up, and, wearied himself by the heat of the day, declared: "I'm also going to bed." And he went off with her.

Aunt Lison then got up in her turn, and, leaving the work she had begun on the arm of the easy-chair, as well as her wool and her knitting-needles, she went and leant out at the window and contemplated the delicious night.

The two *fiancés* were walking up and down, across the lawn, from the grove to the steps, from the steps to the grove. They pressed one another's fingers and spoke not a word, as if they had got out of themselves and mingled with the visible poetry which was breathing from the earth.

Jeanne suddenly perceived in the frame of the

window the outline of the old maid, which was defined by the lighted lamp.

"There," she said, "is Aunt Lison looking at us."

The Vicomte raised his head, and in the indifferent voice of one who speaks without thinking, rejoined:

"Yes; Aunt Lison is looking at us."

And they went on dreaming, walking slowly, loving each other.

But the dew was covering the grass; they felt a slight chilliness.

"Let's go in now," she said.

And they returned.

When they entered, Aunt Lison had again begun to knit; her forehead was bent over her work, and her thin fingers trembled a bit, as if they were very tired.

Jeanne came.

"Aunt, we are going to sleep now."

The old maid lifted her eyes; they were red, as if she had cried. The lovers paid no heed to it; but the young man all at once saw that Jeanne's thin shoes were quite soaked with moisture. He became uneasy, and asked affectionately: "Are not your dear little feet cold?"

And suddenly the aunt's fingers trembled so much that she dropped her work; the ball of wool rolled away on the floor; and, quickly hiding her face in her hands, she began to cry with great convulsive sobs.

The two *fiancés* gazed at her in astonishment, without moving. Jeanne, who was upset, knelt by her, and drew away her hands, repeating:

"What is the matter? what is the matter, Aunt Lison?"

Then the poor woman, her voice drowned in tears and her body convulsed with grief, stammered:

"When he asked you—Are not your—your —dear—dear little feet cold?—No one ever said anything like it to me—not to me—never —never."

Jeanne was taken by surprise, and full of pity; yet she felt inclined to laugh at the idea of a lover saying tender things to Lison; and the Vicomte had turned away to conceal his merriment.

But the aunt rose all at once, left her wool on the floor, and her knitting on the arm-chair, and went off without a light to the dark staircase, feeling her way to her room.

When they were alone, the young couple looked at each other, feeling both amused and sorry. Jeanne murmured: "Poor aunt!" Julien replied: "She must be a bit crazy to-night."

They held one another's hands, unable to make up their minds to separate, and gently, very gently they exchanged their first kiss before the empty chair which Aunt Lison had just left.

They hardly thought, next day, about the old maid's tears.

The fortnight preceding the marriage was for Jeanne very calm and quiet, as if she had been fatigued with gentle emotions.

Nor had she time to reflect during the morning of the eventful day. She merely felt a strong sensation of emptiness in her whole body, as if her flesh, blood and bones had melted under the skin; and

she noticed, when she touched things, that her fingers trembled a good deal.

She only recovered her self-possession in the chancel of the church during the marriage service.

Married! So she was married! The succession of things, of movements, of events accomplished since daybreak appeared to her a dream, a real dream. It was one of those moments when everything about us seems changed; even gestures have a new meaning; even the hours do not seem to be in their usual places.

She felt stunned, above all amazed. The day before there had been no modification in her life; her constant hope was only becoming nearer, almost within reach. She had gone to sleep a girl; now she was a wife.

So she had crossed the barrier which seems to hide the future with all its dreamed-of joys and happinesses. It was as if a door had been opened before her; she was about to enter the Promised Land.

The ceremony was over. They passed into the vestry, which was nearly empty; for no guests had been invited; then they came out again.

When they appeared at the church door, a terrific noise startled the bride, and drew a shriek from the Baroness; it was a salvo of guns fired by the peasants, and the noise did not cease as far as Les Peuples.

A collation was served for the family, the curés of Les Peuples and Yport, the bridegroom, and the witnesses chosen from among the big farmers of the neighbourhood.

Then they strolled in the garden, whilst waiting

for dinner. The Baron, the Baroness, Aunt Lison, the mayor, and the Abbé Picot walked along the Baroness's avenue; whilst in the opposite one the other priest was reading his breviary and walking with big strides.

You could hear, on the other side of the château, the boisterous gaiety of the peasants who were drinking cider under the apple-trees. The whole country, in its Sunday best, thronged the court-yard. The young men and the girls ran after each other.

Jeanne and Julien crossed the wood, then went up on the slope, and looked at the sea, neither of them speaking. It was a little chilly, although it was the middle of August; a north wind was blowing, and the great sun shone hard in a perfectly blue sky.

The young couple, in search of a sheltered spot, turned to the right and crossed the waste land; they wanted to go to the undulating, wooded valley that stretches down to Yport.

On reaching the coppices they felt no wind, and they left the road for a narrow path, buried beneath the leafage.

They could hardly walk abreast, so she felt an arm gliding gently round her waist.

She said nothing; she was gasping, her heart beat hurriedly, her breathing was difficult. The low branches caressed their hair; they often bent down to pass them. She plucked a leaf; two ladybirds, like two fragile red shells, lay under it.

Then she said innocently, rather more at ease: "Look! there's a husband and wife."

Julien brushed her ear with his mouth: "To-night you will be my wife."

Although she had learnt many things during her stay in the country, she was still only thinking about the poetry of love, and she was taken aback. His wife? Wasn't she his wife already?

Then he began to kiss her with quick, little kisses on the temple and neck, where the short hair curled. Every time she was startled by this man's kisses, to which she was not accustomed, and she instinctively bent her head on the other side, to avoid the caress which nevertheless enraptured her.

But they suddenly found themselves at the edge of the wood. She stopped, in confusion at being so far from the château. What would they think? "Let us return," she said.

He withdrew the arm with which he was clasping her waist, and, as they both turned, they came face to face, so near that they felt each other's breath on their faces, and they gazed at one another. They gazed with one of those fixed, keen, penetrating looks, in which two souls think they are blending. They looked for one another in their eyes, behind their eyes, in the impenetrable unknown of the being; they plumbed one another in a mute, persistent interrogation. What would they be to one another? What would that life be which they were beginning together? What joys, happinesses or disillusions were in reserve for them in the long, indissoluble *tête-à-tête* of marriage? And it seemed to both of them that they had not yet seen one another.

And suddenly Julien, placing his hands on his wife's shoulders, imprinted on her mouth a linger-

ing kiss, such as she had never yet had. It descended, it pierced to her veins and marrow, and it gave her such a mysterious shock that, in her bewilderment, she repulsed him with both hands, and nearly fell on her back.

"Let's go, let's go!" she stammered.

He did not answer, but took hold of her hands, which he kept in his.

They exchanged no further words till they reached the house. The rest of the afternoon seemed long.

They sat down to table when night fell.

The dinner was simple and quite short, contrary to Norman custom. A sort of embarrassment paralyzed the party. But the two priests, the mayor, and the four farmers, who had been invited, displayed some of that vulgar merriment which is bound to accompany a marriage.

When the laughter became faint, the mayor would revive it with a joke. It was about nine; they were going to have coffee. Outside beneath the apple-trees of the first court-yard, the open-air ball was starting. The whole *fête* could be seen through the open window. The tapers, hanging from the branches, changed the leaves to shades of verdigris. The rustics leapt about, shouting a wild dance-tune, which was feebly accompanied by two violins and a clarionette player, perched upon a big kitchen table. The peasants' boisterous singing entirely drowned at times the sound of the instruments; and the thin music, torn to pieces by the noisy voices, seemed to be dropping from the sky in pieces, in small fragments of a few scattered notes.

Two large barrels, surrounded by flaming torches, supplied the crowd with drink. Two servants were always busy rinsing glasses and bowls in a tub, and holding them, still dripping with water, under the taps whence flowed a red stream of wine, or a golden stream of pure cider. And the thirsty dancers pressed around, stretched out their arms to seize a glass in their turn, and, throwing their heads back, poured great quantities of the liquid they preferred down their throats.

On a table there were bread, butter, cheese and sausages. Every one swallowed a mouthful from time to time, and the healthy, rowdy *fête*, taking place under the ceiling of illuminated leaves, filled the dull guests in the dining-room with a desire to dance likewise, to drink from the huge casks, eating a slice of bread with butter and raw onion.

The mayor, who was beating time with his knife, cried: "Sacriste! that's fine! Why, it's like the marriage of Ganache."

There was a quiver of stifled laughter. But the Abbé Picot, the natural enemy of civil authority, rejoined: "You mean Cana." The mayor did not accept the correction. "No, M. le curé, I know what I mean; when I say Ganache, I say Ganache."

They got up and went to the drawing-room. Then they mixed a little with the peasants; and finally the guests retired.

The Baron and his wife had a kind of quarrel in a low voice. Madame Adélaïde, more out of breath than ever, seemed to be refusing her husband's request; at last she said, almost out loud: "No,

my dear, I can't; I shouldn't know how to set about it."

So the Baron left her abruptly and came up to Jeanne. "Will you come for a stroll with me, my love?" She replied, full of emotion: "As you like, papa." They went out.

When they had got out of doors, a little dry breeze was blowing from the sea, one of those cold summer winds, which already herald autumn.

Clouds rushed by in the heavens, now covering, now revealing the stars.

The Baron pressed his daughter's arm, holding her hand affectionately. They walked a few minutes. He appeared irresolute, worried. At last he made up his mind.

"My darling, I have a difficult task to fulfil, which really belongs to your mother; but as she refuses it, I have to take her place. I don't know how far you're aware of the facts of life. There are mysteries which are carefully hidden from children, especially girls, who have to remain pure in mind, irreproachably pure, until we consign them to the arms of the man who is going to take care of their happiness. It is for him to raise the veil thrown over the sweet secret of life. But girls, if they have not yet suspected anything, often rebel against the rather brutal reality concealed behind their dreams. Wounded in soul, wounded even in body, they refuse their husbands that which the law, both human law and the law of nature, grant him as an absolute right. I can say no more, my dear; but don't forget this, don't forget that you belong entirely to your husband."

What did she really know? What did she guess?

She had begun trembling, oppressed by an overpowering, painful melancholy as by a presentiment of evil.

They went back. A surprise awaited them at the door of the drawing-room. Madame Adélaïde was sobbing on Julien's breast. Her tears, noisy tears, which seemed forced out by a pair of bellows, as it were, appeared to him to be issuing from her nose, mouth and eyes simultaneously; and the young man, in amazement, was awkwardly holding the fat woman, who had thrown herself into his arms in order to recommend to his care her dear, her darling, her adored daughter.

The Baron rushed up. "Oh! no scenes, please; no sentimentality;" and, taking his wife, he sat her down in an arm-chair, whilst she wiped her face. He then turned to Jeanne: "Come, little one, kiss your mother quickly, and go to bed."

She was ready to cry herself; so she kissed her parents quickly and ran up.

Aunt Lison had already withdrawn to her room. The Baron and his wife were alone with Julien. And they were all three so embarrassed that they uttered not a word. The two men, in evening dress, were standing up, staring aimlessly, whilst Madame Adélaïde had sunk back in her seat, with the remains of sobs heaving her breast. Their embarrassment became intolerable, and the Baron began talking about the journey on which the young couple were to start in a few days.

Jeanne let herself be undressed in her room by Rosalie, who cried like a fountain. Her hands wandered about at hazard; she could not find the strings and pins, and certainly seemed more agi-

tated than even her mistress. But Jeanne hardly noticed her maid's tears, she seemed to have entered into another world, to have gone off to another earth, separated from everything she had known, from everything she had cherished. Everything in her life and thought appeared upside-down: the strange idea even occurred to her: "Did she love her husband?" He suddenly seemed a stranger she was hardly acquainted with. Three months ago she was not aware of his existence, and now he was his wife. Why? Why fall so quickly into marriage, as into a hole open beneath your feet?

When she had put on her night-dress, she slipped into her bed, and its rather fresh linen made her skin shiver, and increased the feeling of cold, solitude and sadness which had been weighing on her soul for the last two hours.

Rosalie went off, still sobbing, and Jeanne waited. She waited anxiously, with palpitating heart, for what her father had confusedly declared the mysterious revelation of love's great secret.

There were three gentle knocks at the door, although she had not heard anybody coming upstairs. She trembled horribly, and did not reply. There was another knock, then the handle creaked. She hid her head under the sheets, as if a thief had got in. Boots creaked slightly on the floor, and suddenly somebody touched the bed.

She started nervously, and uttered a little cry; and uncovering her head, she saw Julian standing before her, smiling as he gazed at her. "Oh, how you frightened me!" she said.

He answered: "You didn't expect me, then?"

She did not reply. He was in evening dress, and his handsome face wore a serious look; and she felt dreadfully ashamed of being in bed in the presence of this man who looked so correct.

They did not know what to say or do; they did not even dare to look at one another at that serious and decisive moment, on which depends all the ultimate happiness of life.

Perhaps he vaguely felt what danger lies in that battle, and what supple self-possession, what astute tenderness are needed not to offend any of the subtle shames, the infinite delicacies of a virgin soul, nourished by dreams.

Then he took her hand gently and kissed it, and, kneeling by the bed as before an altar, he murmured in a voice as light as a breath of wind: "Will you love me?"

Reassured all at once, she raised her head, covered with a cloud of lace, on to the pillow, and smiled: "I love you already, dear."

He put his wife's slender little fingers in his mouth, and, his voice altered by this gag of flesh, asked: "Will you prove to me that you love me?"

Again she felt troubled, and, remembering her father's words, without well understanding what she said, she answered: "I am yours, dear."

He covered her wrist with moist kisses, and, rising slowly, he bent his face near hers, which she again began to hide.

Suddenly, throwing one arm over the bed, he embraced his wife across the sheets, whilst, slipping his other arm under the pillow, he raised it with her head on it; and, in a very low, a very low voice, he asked: "Well, will you give me a little room by your side?"

She was instinctively alarmed, and stammered: "Oh, not yet, please."

He seemed disappointed, rather offended, and rejoined in a tone that was still pleasing, but more abrupt: "Why put it off, as it's bound to be so?"

She was angry at his saying that; but, being submissive and resigned, she again repeated: "I am yours, dear."

Then he disappeared quickly into the dressing-room, and she distinctly heard him moving about, as well as the rustling of his clothes as they were taken off, a jingling of money in his pocket, and the noise of his boots as each fell on the floor.

* * * * *

Then she began to think. She felt despair in the bottom of her soul, despair at the destruction of a delicious love-dream she had imagined so different, at the crushing of a sweet hope, at the disillusion of a happiness: "So that's what he means by being his wife! that! that!"

And she remained like that a long time, in utter despondency, her eyes wandering over the tapestries on the walls, the ancient love-legend that enveloped her room.

As Julien neither spoke nor moved, she turned slowly towards him, and noticed that he was asleep! Asleep, with his mouth half-open, his face calm! Asleep!

She could not believe it; she felt indignant, more outraged by his slumbering than by his brutal treatment of her. Was it possible for him to sleep on such a night? Perhaps there was nothing surprising to him in what had happened. Oh! she would rather he had struck her, bruised her with his odious caresses till she had fainted.

She remained still, leaning on her elbow, bending over him, listening to his light breathing, which was sometimes like a snore.

Daylight appeared, dim at first, then bright, then pink, then brilliant. Julien opened his eyes, yawned, stretched his arms, looked at his wife, smiled, and asked: "Did you sleep well, darling?"

She observed that he now said "thou" to her, and answered in astonishment: "Why, yes. And you?" He said: "Oh! I did very well." And, turning to her, he kissed her, and then began talking quietly. He developed plans of living, accompanied by ideas of economy; and the word "economy," which occurred several times, amazed Jeanne. She listened to him without quite understanding the meaning of his words, she looked at him, and thought of a thousand things in rapid succession, which hardly stirred her mind.

It struck eight. "Come on," he said, "we must get up; we should make ourselves ridiculous if we remained long in bed," and he got up first. When he had finished dressing, he gallantly helped his wife in all the small details of her toilet, not allowing her to call Rosalie.

As he was going out, he stopped her: "Between ourselves, you know, we can 'thou' each other now, but we had better wait a little longer, when your parents are present. It will be quite natural when we return from our honeymoon."

She did not show herself till lunch; and the day passed just as usual, as if nothing new had happened. It was merely that there was another man in the house.

CHAPTER V

FOUR days later the berlin arrived which was to take them to Marseilles.

After the anguish of the first night, Jeanne had already accustomed herself to contact with Julien, to his kisses, his tender caresses, although her repugnance for their more intimate relations had not diminished.

She found him handsome, she loved him; she felt herself happy again and in gay spirits.

The adieux were brief and had no sadness in them. The Baroness alone seemed moved; and at the moment the carriage was about to start, she placed a big purse, heavy as lead, in her daughter's hand: "That's for your little private expenses," she said.

Jeanne put it in her pocket, and they started.

In the evening Julien remarked: "How much is there in your mother's purse?" She was not thinking about it any more, and turned it out on her knees. A quantity of gold came out: 2,000 francs. She clapped her hands. "I shall play the giddy with it," she cried, and put the money back again.

After an eight days' journey in terrible heat, they reached Marseilles.

And the next day, the *Roi-Louis*, a little packet-

boat which was going to Naples *vid* Ajaccio took them on their way to Corsica.

Corsica! the jungles! the brigands! the mountains! the birth-place of Napoleon! It seemed to Jeanne she was leaving real life and entering into a waking-dream.

Standing side by side on deck, they watched the cliffs of Provence fly past. Before them, under the boundless sky, of an almost exaggerated blue, spread the motionless dark-blue sea, which was, as it were, fixed, hardened in the burning light that fell from the sun.

She said: "Do you remember our trip in old Lastique's boat?"

Instead of replying, he quickly dropped a kiss in her ear.

The steamer's paddles beat the water, disturbing its dense slumber; and behind the vessel, a long foaming path, a big pale track where the troubled waves frothed like champagne, stretched, as far as eye could see, in the boat's plumb-straight wake.

All at once, only a few fathoms ahead, an enormous fish, a dolphin, leapt out of the water, then plunged in again head first, and vanished. Jeanne was startled and frightened; she uttered a cry and threw herself on Julien's breast. Then she began to laugh at her fright, and anxiously watched for the creature to re-appear. After a few seconds it leapt up again, like a big mechanical toy. Then it dived in again, and again leapt out; then came two, then three, then six of them, and they appeared to gambol about the heavy boat, to form an escort for their monstrous brother, the fish of wood with iron fins. They passed to the

left of the boat, returned to the right, and, now swimming together, now one after the other, as in a game of merry pursuit, they would dash into the air with a huge jump describing a curve, and then they would plunge again into the sea in Indian file.

Jeanne clapped her hands, and quivered with rapture at each appearance of the huge, pliant creatures. Her heart leapt with them in a wild, childlike joy.

On a sudden they disappeared. They were seen once again very far out in the offing; then they were no longer visible, and Jeanne felt for a few minutes quite disappointed at their departure.

Evening came, a quiet, sweet, radiant evening, full of brightness, of happy peacefulness. Not a movement in the air or on the water; and this limitless rest of the sea and sky instilled itself into their quietened souls, in which also there was no passing ripple.

The great sun was slowly sinking towards invisible Africa—Africa, the burning land whose heat they fancied they felt already; but a kind of cool caress, which yet was nothing like a breeze, freshened their faces when the orb had vanished.

They did not want to go into the cabin, where they would encounter all the horrible smells of a packet-boat; and they lay down on deck, side by side, wrapped up in their cloaks. Julien went to sleep at once; but Jeanne remained with her eyes open, agitated by the unknown future of their journey. The monotonous noise of the paddles soothed her; and she gazed above her at the legions of bright stars with their keen, glittering

light, which was bathed, as it were, in the pure sky of the South.

Towards morning, however, she went to sleep. She was awakened by noises and the sound of voices. The sailors were singing and getting the boat in order. She shook her husband, who had not moved in his sleep, and they got up.

She enthusiastically drank in the taste of the salt mist which penetrated to the tips of her fingers. Everywhere the sea. But ahead there appeared, lying on the waves, something grey and still vague in the growing dawn; a sort of accumulation of strange, pointed, jagged clouds.

Presently it appeared more distinctly; the forms stood out more clearly against the brightening sky; a great line of horned, bizarre mountains arose; it was Corsica, wrapt in a kind of thin veil.

And the sun rose behind, defining all the prominences of the crest with black shadows; then all the summits were lit up, whilst the rest of the island remained befogged.

The captain, a little old man tanned, dried, toughened, hardened, shrunk by the rough salt winds, came on deck; and, in a voice hoarsened by thirty years of command, worn out by shouting amid storms, he observed to Jeanne: "Can you smell it from over there?"

She did actually notice a strong, peculiar smell of plants, an aroma of wild vegetation.

The captain went on:

"That's Corsica that smells like that; she is a pretty woman and that's her scent. After twenty years' absence, I should recognize it five miles off. I am a Corsican. Over there, at St. Helena,

he is always speaking of the smell of his country, they say. He is one of my family "

And the captain, taking off his hat, saluted Corsica, and saluted the great captive Emperor, who was one of his family, over there, across the ocean

Jeanne was so moved that she nearly cried

Then the sailor stretched his arm towards the horizon: "The Sanguinaires!" he said

Julien, standing near his wife, held her by the waist, and they both gazed into the distance to discover the point indicated

They at last caught sight of some pyramid-shaped rocks, which the vessel soon rounded, and entered an immense, quiet bay, surrounded by a crowd of high peaks, whose lower slopes seemed covered with moss

The captain pointed out this green mass: "The jungle "

As they advanced, the circle of mountains seemed to close up behind the boat, which was slowly floating along in an azure lake so transparent that they could sometimes see the bottom

And all at once the town came into view, all white, at the bottom of the bay, on the edge of the sea, at the foot of the mountains.

A few small Italian ships were at anchor in the harbour. Four or five boats came prowling round the *Roi-Louis*, looking for passengers.

Julien, who was collecting the luggage, asked his wife in a low voice: "Twenty sous is enough for the steward, isn't it?"

For the last week he had been continually putting the same question, which hurt her feelings

every time She replied, with some impatience: "If you are not sure of giving enough, better give too much."

He was continually haggling with the landlords and waiters, with the cabmen, with shopmen of all kinds, and when he had obtained some reduction by dint of argument, he would say to Jeanne, rubbing his hands: "I don't like to be robbed"

She trembled when she saw the bills brought, because she knew beforehand the remarks he would make about each item, she was humiliated by such chaffering, and blushed to the roots of her hair at the servants' staring, contemptuous looks at her husband, as they held in their hands his mean "tips"

He also had a dispute with the boatman who took them ashore

The first tree she saw was a palm!

They went to a big, empty hotel, at the corner of a vast square, and had lunch

They stayed three days in the little town hidden at the end of its blue bay, hot as a furnace behind its mountain-curtain, which never allows the wind to blow through to it.

Then an itinerary was made out for their trip, and they decided to hire horses, so as not to be obliged to shrink from attempting any difficult part. So they got hold of two small, wild-eyed, thin, active Corsican stallions, and started one morning at day-break. A guide accompanied them on a mule and carried the provisions, because inns are unknown in this wild country.

The road at first followed the bay and presently plunged into a shallow valley leading to the big

mountains. They often crossed torrents, which were nearly dry; a semblance of a stream still stirred beneath the rocks, like a lurking animal, and uttered a timid gurgle.

The barren land seemed quite bare. The hillsides were covered with tall grass, which was yellow owing to the hot season. They occasionally met a mountaineer on foot or on a pony, or astride on an ass no bigger than a dog. And they all had loaded guns on their backs, old rusty arms, formidable in their hands.

The pungent perfume of the aromatic plants, with which the island is covered, seemed to densen the air; and the road went on rising slowly amid the long windings of the mountains.

The pink or blue granite peaks lent the vast landscape a fairy colouring; and, on the lower slopes, huge chestnut forests had the look of green thickets, so gigantic are the undulations of the high ground in this country.

The guide sometimes mentioned a name, pointing to the escarped heights. Jeanne and Julien would gaze and see nothing; at last they would make out something grey, like a mass of rocks fallen from the summit. It was a village, a little granite hamlet crouching there, clinging like a regular bird's-nest, almost invisible on the immense mountain.

The long journey at a walking-pace wearied Jeanne: "Let's gallop a little," she suggested. And she started off. Then, when she did not hear her husband galloping near her, she turned round and had a mad fit of laughter, when she saw him coming along, pale with fear, holding on to the

horse's mane, and jolting about in a weird way. His very handsomeness, his knightly air, made his clumsiness and fright all the more funny.

So they went at a gentle trot. The road now stretched between two interminable thickets that covered the whole mountain-side like a cloak.

It was the jungle, the impenetrable jungle, formed of green oaks, junipers, arbutus, lentisk, buckthorn, heaths, laurustines, myrtles and box-trees, in which were interlaced, mingled together like hair, clinging clematis, monstrous ferns, honeysuckle, rosemary, lavender, and briars, which cast over the mountains an inextricable network.

They were hungry. The guide rejoined them and took them to one of those delicious springs that are so common in precipitous regions, a thin, round thread of icy water, which issues from a small hole in the rock and flows into a chestnut leaf used by the passer-by to guide the slender stream to his mouth.

Jeanne felt so happy that she had great difficulty in suppressing her cries of joy.

They set off again and began to descend, riding round the bay of Sagone.

Towards evening they went through Cargèse, the Greek village founded there a long time ago by a colony of fugitives who had been driven from their country.

Some tall, fine girls, with well-developed hips, long hands, and slender waists, who were remarkably graceful, formed a group by a fountain. When Julien wished them "Good-evening!" they replied in a singing voice in the harmonious language of the country they had left.

When they reached Piana, they had to beg for hospitality just as in olden times and in out-of-the-way regions. Jeanne trembled with joy as they awaited the opening of the door at which Julien had knocked. Ah! that was something like travelling! it had all the unexpectedness of undiscovered country.

They happened to have to do with a young couple. They were received, as the patriarchs must have received the guest sent by God, and they slept on a mattress of maize, in an old, worm-eaten house; the whole woodwork of it, dug into by worms, scored all over by long, beam-devouring teredos, rumbled, seemed to be alive and to breathe.

They set off at sunrise, and soon stopped in front of a forest, a regular forest of purple granite. There were peaks, columns, steeples, and wonderful figures moulded by the weather, the biting wind, and the sea-fogs.

Jeanne did not speak, her heart was full, and she took Julien's hand, which she pressed tightly, overcome by a need of loving in the presence of such beauty of nature.

And all at once, leaving this chaos, they discovered a new gulf entirely girt round by a blood-red granite wall. And the scarlet rocks were reflected in the blue sea.

Jeanne murmured: "Oh! Julien!" and could find no other words, moved to tenderness by admiration; she felt almost suffocated, and two tears overflowed her eyes. He looked at her in amazement and asked: "What is the matter, my pet?"

She dried her cheeks, smiled, and remarked in rather a tremulous voice: "It's nothing—it's nerves—I don't know—it came over me. I am so happy that the least thing overcomes me."

He did not understand his wife's attacks of nerves, the nervous shocks of those quivering beings who go wild over nothing, whom an enthusiasm stirs as if it were a catastrophe, whom an indefinable feeling may revolutionize, may madden with joy or despair.

Her tears seemed to him ridiculous, and, his attention entirely absorbed by the bad road, he observed: "It would be better if you looked after your horse."

They descended to the bottom of the gulf by an almost impracticable road, and then turned to the right so as to ascend the sombre valley of Ota.

But the path looked terribly dangerous. Julien suggested: "Shall we climb up on foot?" Nothing could have pleased her more; she was enchanted to walk, to be alone with him after her recent emotion.

The guide went in front with the mule and the horses, whilst they trudged along slowly.

The mountain, cleft from top to bottom, half-opened. In the breach the path buried itself. It ran between two prodigious walls; and a mighty torrent traversed the crevass. The air was i y, the granite appeared black, and the little that could be seen of the blue sky above filled them with wonder and bewilderment.

A sudden noise startled Jeanne. She raised her eyes; an enormous bird was flying out of a gap; it was an eagle. Its open wings seemed to touch

the two sides of the chasm, and it rose up to the heavens, where it disappeared.

Farther on, the fissure in the mountain was cut in two; the path climbed between the two ravines in abrupt zigzags. Jeanne, in a gay, foolhardy mood, went first, rolling down pebbles from under her feet, fearlessly bending over precipices. He followed her, rather out of breath, his eyes fixed on the ground for fear of giddiness.

All at once the sun poured down; they felt as if they had emerged from hell. They were thirsty; a track of moisture led them over a chaos of stones to a tiny spring flowing into a hollow stick for the use of the goatherds. The soil around was covered with a carpet of moss. Jeanne knelt down to drink; and Julien did the same.

And as she was sipping the cool water, he took her round the waist and tried to deprive her of her place at the end of the wooden pipe. She resisted; their lips struggled together, met, and repelled one another. In the course of the struggle they seized by turn the thin end of the tube and bit it, so as not to leave it go. And the stream of cold water, which was being continually stopped and freed again, was dispersed and flowed on alternately, splashing their faces, necks, clothes, and hands. Pearl-like drops gleamed in their hair. And kisses were mingled with the stream.

Suddenly Jeanne had an inspiration of love. She filled her mouth with the clear liquid, and, her cheeks puffed out like bladders, she made Julien understand that she wished to quench his thirst, lip to lip.

He stretched out his throat, smiling, with his

head thrown back, his arms open: and he drank in one draught at that spring of living flesh which inflamed his desire within him.

Jeanne leant on him with unusual affection; her heart throbbed; her breasts heaved; her eyes seemed softened, steeped in moisture. She whispered: "Julien! I love you!" and drawing him to her in her turn, she threw herself down, and, red with shame, hid her face in her hands.

* * * * *

They were a long time reaching the top of the mountain, and they only arrived at Evisa in the evening, and put up at the house of a relation of their guide, Paoli Palabretti

He was a tall man, slightly bent, with the melancholy look of a consumptive. He showed them to their room, a gloomy room of bare stone, but handsome in that country where no elegance is known; and he was expressing his pleasure at receiving them in his own language, a Corsican patois, hashed up of French and Italian, when a clear voice interrupted him; and a little brown woman, with large black eyes, a skin warmed by the sun, a slender waist, and teeth always showing in a perpetual smile, darted in, kissed Jeanne, and shook Julien's hand, repeating: "Good-day, Madame, good-day, Monsieur, how do you do?"

She took their hats, shawls, and arranged everything with one arm, because the other was in a sling; then she made them all go out, telling her husband: "Go for a walk with them till dinner-time."

M. Palabretti at once obeyed, placed himself between the young couple, and showed them round

the village. He dragged in his steps and his words, coughing frequently, and repeating at each attack: "The cool air of the Val has got on my chest."

He led them by a lonely track beneath some huge chestnuts. He suddenly stopped, and remarked in his monotonous voice: "This is where my cousin, Jean Rinaldi, was killed by Mathieu Lori. Why, I was there, quite near Jean, when Mathieu appeared, ten paces off. 'Jean,' he cried, 'don't go to Albertacce; don't go there, Jean, or I kill you, I'll kill you.'

"I took Jean by the arm: 'Don't go, Jean, he'll do it.'

"It was because of a girl they were both after, Paulina Sinacoupi.

"But Jean began shouting: 'I shall go, Mathieu; it isn't you that'll stop me.'

"Mathieu then levelled his gun, before I could get mine ready, and fired.

"Jean gave a great jump, two feet high, like a puppet dancing by a string, yes, sir, and he fell back right on my body, with such force that my gun dropped and rolled as far as the big chestnut there.

"Jean's mouth was wide open, but he spoke no more, he was dead."

The young couple gazed stupefied at the calm witness of the crime. Jeanne asked: "And the murderer?"

Paoli Palabretti coughed a long time, and then made reply: "He reached the mountain. My brother killed him the following year. You know, my brother, Philippi Palabretti, the bandit."

Jeanne shivered: "Your brother? A bandit?"

A gleam of pride flashed in the eye of the cool Corsican: "Yes, Madame, he was famous, he was. He did for six gendarmes. He died with Nicolas Morali, when they were surrounded in the Niolo, after a six days' fight, when they were on the point of starving to death."

Then he added, resignedly: "It's the country that does it," in the same tone in which he observed: "It's the cool air of the Val."

Then they went back to dinner, and the little Corsican treated them as if she had known them twenty years.

But Jeanne had a sense of disquiet. Would she feel again in Julien's arms that strange, vehement shock of the senses which she had felt by the spring?

When they were alone in their room, she trembled lest she should again be insensitive to his kisses. But was quickly reassured; and that was her first night of love.

And the next day she could hardly make up her mind to leave the lowly house, in which it seemed to her a new happiness had begun.

She drew her host's little wife into her room, and whilst absolutely assuring her that she did not wish to make her any present, she insisted, even to the point of being offended, on sending her a souvenir from Paris on her return, a souvenir to which she attached an almost superstitious notion.

The young Corsican opposed her a long while, refusing to accept anything. At last she consented: "Well," said she, "send me a little pistol, quite a little one."

Jeanie opened her eyes wide. The other whis-

pered in her ear, like one confiding a sweet and intimate secret: "It's to kill my brother-in-law." And, with a smile, she quickly unrolled the bandages bound round the arm which she was not using, and displayed her round, white flesh, pierced right through by a stiletto wound that had nearly healed: "If I hadn't been as strong as he," she remarked, "he would have killed me. My husband is not jealous, not he, he knows me; and besides, he's ill, you know; and that calms his blood. Besides, I am an honest woman. I am, Madame; but my brother-in-law believes everything that's said to him. He is jealous for my husband; and he will certainly begin again. So, if I have a small pistol, I should be calm, and sure of avenging myself."

Jeanne promised to send her the weapon, kissed her new friend affectionately, and continued her journey.

The remainder of it was now a long dream, an endless embrace, an intoxication of caresses. She saw nothing, neither landscape, nor persons, nor the places she stopped at. Her whole gaze was fixed on Julien.

Then began the childlike, charming intimacy of love-follies, absurd, delicious little words, the baptism of their bodies with pet names.

When they reached Bastia, they had to pay the guide. Julien felt in his pockets. Not finding what he wanted, he remarked to Jeanne: "As you're not using your mother's two thousand francs, give them me to carry. They will be safer in my pocket; and I shan't have to change money." And she handed him her purse.

They went to Leghorn, visited Florence, Genoa, and all the places on the Corniche road.

On a mistraly morning they found themselves again at Marseilles.

Two months had elapsed since their departure from Les Peuples. It was October 15th.

Jeanne, caught by the cold, blustering wind that seemed to blow from up North, from distant Normandy, felt melancholy. For some time Julien had seemed altered, wearied, indifferent; and she was afraid, without knowing why.

She put off their return-journey four days more, unable to make up her mind to leave the kindly country of the sun. It seemed to her she had just finished the round of her happiness.

At last they started off.

They were going to buy at Paris everything needful for their final installation at Les Peuples; and Jeanne was enjoying the prospect of bringing back wonderful things, thanks to her mother's present; but the first thing she thought of was the pistol she had promised the young Corsican woman at Evisa.

The day after their arrival, she said to Julien: "Will you give me back mamma's money, dear, because I want to make my purchases?"

He turned to her with a discontented face.

"How much d'you want?"

She was surprised, and stammered:

"Well—what you please."

He answered: "I shall give you a hundred francs; take care you don't waste them."

She did not know what to say; she was taken aback and confused.

At length she remarked, hesitatingly: "But—I—handed you over that money to——"

He prevented her from finishing.

"Yes, precisely. What's it matter whether it's in your pocket or mine, now that we have the same purse? I am not refusing you any of it, am I? as I am giving you a hundred francs."

She took the five gold pieces without speaking; but she did not dare to ask for any more, and only bought the pistol

A week later, they started on their return-journey to Les Peuples.

CHAPTER VI

The family and the servants were waiting in front of the white railings with buck posts. The post-chaise stopped, and the embraces were long. The Baroness cried; Jeanne was touched, and wiped away two tears; her father walked nervously to and fro.

Then, whilst the luggage was being taken down, the trip was discussed before the drawing-room fire. Abundant words flowed from Jeanne's lips; and everything was told—everything, in half-an-hour, except, perhaps, a few small details forgotten in the rapidity of the narrative.

Presently the young wife went off to unpack. Rosalie, who was also quite excited, helped her. When it was over, when the linen, the dresses, the toilet things had been put in their places, the maid left her mistress; and Jeanne sat down, rather tired.

She asked herself what she was going to do now, she wanted an occupation for her mind, a task for her hands. She did not care about going down to the drawing-room, where her mother was dozing; and she thought she would walk, but the country seemed so gloomy, that she felt a melancholy oppression at her heart, merely when she looked out of the window.

Then she perceived that she had nothing more to do, that she never would have. Her whole youth at the convent had been busied with the future, filled up with dreams. During that period the continual excitement of her expeotations occupied her time, without her noticing its passage. Afterwards, she had hardly emerged from the austere walls where her illusions had flowered forth, than her notion of love had been at once fulfilled. The man hoped-for she had met, loved, married in a few weeks, as people marry when they suddenly make up their minds, and he carried her off in his arms without letting her reflect about anything.

But now the sweet reality of the first days was about to become the daily reality that shut the door to the undefined hopes, the delightful disquiet about the unknown. Yes, it was all over with expectations.

Now there was nothing more to do, nor to-morrow, nor ever. She felt it all vaguely with a certain disillusion, a destruction of her dreams.

She got up, and glued her forehead against the cold glass. Presently, after she had gazed some time at the sky, through which dark clouds were sailing, she decided to go out.

Was it the same country, the same grass, the same trees as in the month of May? What had become of the sunny cheerfulness of the leaves, and the green poetry of the lawn where the dandelions shone, where the poppies blazed, where the marguerites were radiant, where the fantastic yellow butterflies fluttered, as if moved by invisible threads? And that intoxication of the air laden

with life, with perfumes, with fertilizing atoms, was no longer there

The avenues, drenched by the continual autumn rain, were covered by a thick carpet of dead leaves, beneath the shivering leanness of the poplars, that were nearly bare The thin branches trembled in the wind, still shaking a few leaves that were ready to fall into space. And unceasingly, all day long, like an incessant rain, sad enough to bring tears to the eyes, those last leaves, quite yellow now, like broad golden pennies, were detached from their stems, hovered, whirled and fell

She went to the wood It was as miserable as the room of a dying man The green wall, which used to separate the pretty winding paths and convert them into secret trysting-places, had been dispersed The shrubs, that had been intermingled like a lace-work of delicate wood, dashed their lean branches against one another, and the rustling of the dry, fallen leaves which the wind moved, blew about, and, in some places, piled up in heaps, seemed to her a dolorous sigh of agony.

The birds hopped from spot to spot, with a shivering little chirp, on the look-out for shelter.

But, shielded by the thick curtain of elms, which were a vanguard against the blasts from the sea, the lime and the plane-tree, which were still wrapt in their summer ornaments, looked as if clothed, the one in red velvet the other in orange silk; they had been dyed like that by the first chills, after the nature of their sap

Jeanne went slowly to and fro in her mother's alley, along the Couillard's farm. Something oppressed her like a presentiment of the long bore-

dom of the monotonous life which was commencing for her.

Presently she sat down on the slope where Julien had first spoken of love; and she remained there, dreaming, almost without thinking, wearied to the heart, longing to go to bed, to sleep, in order to escape the gloominess of that day.

All at once she noticed a gull flying across the sky, borne along by a squall; and she recalled the eagle she had seen there, in Corsica, in the sombre valley of Ota. She felt at heart the keen pang occasioned by the memory of a happy incident, now in the past; and she suddenly saw again the radiant island, with its wild odour, its sun that ripened oranges and citrons, its rose-peaked mountains, its azure bays, and its ravines down which torrents dash.

Now the damp, rugged landscape around her, with the mournful falling of the leaves, and the grey clouds hurried on by the wind, filled her with such desolate sensations that she went indoors in order not to burst into sobs.

Her mother was slumbering in front of the hearth; she was used to those melancholy days, and no longer troubled about them. Her father and Julien had gone off for a walk, to talk over business. And night came, casting gloomy shadows over the immense drawing-room, which was fitfully lit up by the fire.

Outside, in what was left of daylight, you might still distinguish through the windows the dirty landscape, characteristic of the end of the year, and the greyish sky, which seemed itself to have been rubbed in mud.

The Baron soon came in, followed by Julien; as soon as he entered the darkened room, he rang the bell, exclaiming: "Quick, quick! the lights! it's wretched here."

And he sat down before the fire-place. Whilst his soaked boots were smoking near the flames, and the mud was dropping from the soles, dried by the heat, he cheerily rubbed his hands. "I believe," he said "it's going to freeze; the sky is clearing in the north; it's full moon this evening; there'll be a hard frost to-night."

Then, turning to his daughter: "Well, dear, are you glad to be back in your own country, in your own house, near the old people?"

This simple question upset Jeanne. She threw herself into her father's arms, her eyes full of tears, and kissed him nervously, as if to get his forgiveness; for, in spite of her best efforts to be gay, she felt as sad as if she were about to faint. But she thought of the joy she had promised herself on seeing her parents again, and she was astonished at the coldness which paralyzed her tenderness, as if, when one has thought a great deal afar off about people one loves, and has lost the habit of continually seeing them, one experienced, on seeing them again, a kind of suspension of affection until the bonds of ordinary life have been knit together again.

Dinner took a long time; hardly a word was said. Julien appeared to have forgotten his wife.

Presently, in the drawing-room, she let herself be lulled to sleep by the fire, opposite her mother, who was fast asleep; and, when she was awakened for a moment by the voices of two men in discus-

sion, she asked herself, as she tried to arouse her brain, whether she was also going to be a victim of that dull lethargy of the habits, which nothing interrupts.

The fire, soft and reddish in the daylight, was becoming lively, clean, crackling. It cast great sudden gleams on the faded tapestries of the arm-chairs, on the fox and the stork, on the melancholy heron, on the grasshopper and the ant.

The Baron came up, smiling, and opening his fingers to the blaze: "Ah, ah! that's a good fire this evening. It's freezing, my dears, it's freezing." He then laid his hand on Jeanne's shoulder, and pointing to the fire: "Look, my dear, that's the finest thing in the world; the hearth—the hearth with one's family around. Nothing's as good as that. But let's go to bed. Why, you children must be worn out."

When she had returned to her room, the young wife asked herself how it was that her present return to the spots she believed she loved could be so different from the first one. Why did she feel bruised, as it were? why did this house, this dear country, everything that, up to now, used to thrill her heart, why did they appear to her to-day so appalling?

But her eye suddenly fell on the clock. The little bee was still swinging from left to right, and from right to left, with the same quick, continuous movement, above the vermilion flowers. Then, all at once, Jeanne was penetrated by an impulse of affection, moved to tears by that little bit of machinery which seemed alive, which sang the hour to her, and throbbed like a human heart.

She had certainly not been as much touched when she kissed her father and mother. The heart has mysteries impenetrable to any reasoning.

For the first time since her marriage she was alone in bed, Jeanne, under the pretext of fatigue, had taken another room. Besides, it was agreed that both should have their own room

She was long in going to sleep, astonished at not feeling a body pressed against her own, unaccustomed to solitary slumber, and worried by the vicious north wind, which blew its worst against the roof.

She was awakened in the morning by a great splendour of light, that dyed her bed a blood-colour; and her window-panes, all daubed over with hoar-frost, were red, as if the entire horizon were on fire.

Wrapping herself in a big dressing-gown, she ran to the window and opened it.

An icy breeze, healthy and keen, rushed into her room, stinging her skin with a sharp chill that made her eyes water; and, in the middle of a purple sky, a huge sun, crimson and bloated like a drunkard's face, appeared behind the trees. The ground, covered with white frost, hard and dry for the moment, rang beneath the farm labourers' feet That one night had been enough to strip all the poplar branches which still had leaves; and behind the heath appeared the great greenish line of the waves, studded with white tracts.

The plane and the lime were being rapidly bared by the gales. As each icy gust blew past, whirlwinds of leaves, torn off by the rough frost, were scattered in the wind like a flight of birds. Jeanne

dressed, went out, and, in order to occupy herself, visited the farmers.

The Martins raised their arms in astonishment, and the mistress of the house kissed her on the cheeks; then they made her drink a small glass of noyeau. And she went to the other farm. The Couillards were also astonished; the mistress pecked at her ears, and she had to swallow a small glass of cassis.

After which she went back for lunch.

And the day passed like the day before, but it was cold instead of damp. And the other days of the week were like those two; and all the weeks of the month were like the first.

Gradually, however, her regret for distant lands lessened. Habit formed in her life a stratum of resignation similar to the deposits of limestone which certain kinds of water leave on objects; and a kind of interest in the trifling affairs of daily existence, a care for simple and regular mediocre occupations, arose again in her heart. There grew in her a sort of meditative melancholy, a vague disenchantment of life. What was it she needed? What did she desire? She did not know. No longing for society possessed her; no thirst for pleasure, no impulse even towards possible joys; besides, what could they be? Just like the old arm-chairs in the drawing-room, tarnished with age, everything was slowly losing colour in her eyes, everything was fading, was assuming a pale, dreary shade.

Her relations with Julien had changed completely. He seemed quite different since the return from their honeymoon; like an actor who has

finished his part, and reassumes his ordinary expression. He hardly bothered about her, he hardly even spoke to her; all trace of love had suddenly vanished, and there were few nights on which he entered her room.

He had taken up the management of the estate and the house, revised the leases, worried the peasants, reduced expenses; and having assumed the manners and appearance of a gentleman-farmer, he had lost the polish and elegance he had as *fiancé*.

Although it was spotted all over, he always wore an old velvet shooting costume, adorned with brass buttons, which he had found in his bachelor's wardrobe; and becoming careless, as people do who have no further need to please, he had stopped shaving, so that his long beard, badly cut, made him look incredibly less handsome. He no longer cared about his hands; and, after each meal, he drank four or five small glasses of cognac.

When Jeanne essayed reproaching him affectionately, he had replied so rudely: "Aren't you going to leave me alone?" that she did not dare give him any more advice.

She had accepted her share in those changes in a way that astonished herself. He had become a stranger to her—a stranger whose soul and heart were closed to her. She would often think of it, asking herself how it came that, after having met as they did, having loved, married in an enthusiasm of affection, they all at once found that they were as unknown, one to the other, as if they had not slept side by side.

And how was it that she did not suffer more from

his indifference? Was life like that? Had they been deceived? Was there nothing more for her in the future?

Perhaps, if Julien had remained handsome, well-groomed, elegant, seductive, she might have suffered a good deal.

It was agreed that after New Year's day the newly-married couple would live by themselves, and that the Baron and his wife would go and spend a few months in their house at Rouen. During the winter the young people would not leave Les Peuples, in order to finish getting settled and pleasantly accustomed to the places in which they would spend their whole lives. They had, besides, a few neighbours to whom Julien would introduce his wife; namely, the Brisevilles, the Couteliers, and the Fourvilles.

But the young couple could not yet go their round of visits, because it had so far been impossible to get hold of the painter to change the coat-of-arms on the carriage.

The old family vehicle had, it is true, been given by the Baron to his son-in-law, and Julien would not, for anything in the world, have consented to present himself in the neighbouring châteaux, unless the escutcheon of the De Lamares had first been quartered with that of the Leperthuis des Vauds.

Now, there was only one man in the country who made a speciality of heraldic adornments; he was a painter from Bolbec, called Bataille, who was invited in turn to all the Norman castles in

order to affix the precious ornaments on the carriage-doors.

At last, one December morning, towards the end of lunch, they saw a man open the gate and come up the straight path. He carried a box on his back. It was Bataille.

He was asked into the dining-room, and he was served with a meal just as if he had been a gentleman; for his speciality, his continuous relations with the whole aristocracy of the Department, his knowledge of heraldry, of the consecrated terms, of the emblems, had made him a kind of living heraldry, whose hand was shaken by people of good birth.

A pencil and paper were quickly brought, and, whilst he was eating, the Baron and Julien sketched out their quartered escutcheons. The Baroness, who was quite excited where such matters were discussed, gave her opinion, and Jeanne herself took part in the talk, as if some mysterious interest had suddenly been awakened in her.

Bataille, going on with his lunch, indicated his opinion, sometimes took the pencil, traced a scheme, quoted examples, described all the carriages of the county nobility, seemed to bring with him, in his mind, even in his voice, a sort of aristocratic atmosphere.

He was a short man, with thin, grey hair, his hands stained with paint, and he smelt of spirits. It was said he had once been concerned in a terribly immoral business; but the general esteem of all the titled families had long ago effaced the blot.

When he had finished his coffee, they took him to the coach-house, and removed the waxed canvas

that covered the carriage. Bataille examined it, then spoke gravely about the size he thought necessary for his design; and, after a fresh exchange of ideas, he set about his task.

In spite of the cold, the Baroness had a seat brought for her to watch the man at work; presently she asked for a foot-warmer for her feet, which were freezing; and she quietly began chatting with the painter, asking him about the marriages she had not heard of, about recent deaths and births, completing by this information the genealogical tree which she carried in her memory.

Julien had remained near his mother-in-law, astride on a chair. He was smoking a pipe, spitting on the ground, listening, and following with his eye the colouring of his coat-of-arms.

Soon old Simon, who was going to the kitchen-garden with his spade on his shoulder, stopped to contemplate the work; and the news of Bataille's arrival having reached the two farms, the two farmers' wives were not slow in appearing. Standing on either side of the Baroness, they went into ecstasies, repeating: "Well, he must be clever to paint those things!"

The escutcheons on the two carriage-doors could not be finished before the next day at eleven. Every one was punctually there at the time, and the carriage was drawn out so as to judge the result better.

It was perfect. Bataille was complimented, and went off again with his box slung on his back. And the Baron, his wife, Jeanne and Julien, agreed on the point that the painter was a fellow of great

resource, who, if circumstances had permitted, would have become, without doubt, an artist.

But, for the sake of economy, Julien had carried out some reforms, which necessitated fresh changes.

The old coachman had become the gardener, the Vicomte undertaking to drive himself; he had sold the coach-horses in order not to have to pay for their feed.

Next, as somebody was needed to hold the animals when the family got out of the carriage, he had made a "tiger" of a young cowherd called Marius.

Finally, in order to get horses, he introduced a special clause in the lease of the Couillards and the Martins, compelling the two farmers each to furnish a horse on one day every month, on a date fixed by himself, in consideration of which they were exempted from the poultry dues.

So the Couillards had provided a big, yellow-haired jade, and the Martins a small white long-haired horse, and the two steeds were harnessed side by side; and Marius, who was buried in an old livery of Simon, led the carriage to the steps of the château.

Julien, who had furbished himself up, had recovered a little of his former elegance; but his long beard lent him a vulgar look, in spite of all. He examined the horses, the carriage and the little groom, and considered them satisfactory; the only thing that had any importance in his eyes was the newly-painted coat-of-arms.

The Baroness, who came down from her room on her husband's arm, had difficulty in getting in,

and sat with her back propped by cushions. Jeanne then appeared. She first laughed at the pairing of the horses; the white, she said, was the grandson of the yellow; presently, when she perceived Marius, with his face swamped in his cockaded hat, which his nose alone prevented slipping down further, and his hands lost in the depths of the sleeves, and his legs petticoated in the skirts of his livery, whilst his feet, clad in enormous boots, issued grotesquely from underneath; and when she saw him throw his head back in order to see, raise his knee to walk a step, as if he were going to cross a stream, and move like a blind man when obeying orders, entirely lost to sight in the amplitude of his garments, she was seized with an uncontrollable laughter, an endless laughter.

The Baron turned round, gazed at the bewildered little man, and yielding at once to the contagion, burst into a fit of laughing, calling to his wife, unable to speak —" L—l – look at M—M —Marius! Isn't he funny? My God! isn't he funny?"

Whereupon the Baroness, leaning out by the carriage-door and contemplating him, was shaken by such a climax of merriment that the whole carriage danced on its springs, as if it were being jolted on the road

Julien, however, asked with a livid face: "What is there for you to laugh at like that? you must be mad!"

Jeanne, quite ill and convulsed with mirth, powerless to calm herself, sat down on one of the steps. The Baron did the same; whilst, in the carriage, convulsive sneezes, a sort of continuous

chuckling, intimated that the Baroness was on the point of stifling. And all at once Marius's coat began to shake. He had no doubt understood, for he laughed as loud as he could under his *coiffure*.

Then Julien rushed at him in a fury. With one blow he separated the youth's head from the quaint hat which flew on to the grass; then, turning to his father-in-law, he murmured in a voice trembling with rage: "It seems to me it is not for you to laugh. We should not be in this state if you had not squandered your fortune and devoured your possessions. Whose fault is it if you are ruined?"

All merriment was frozen up, ceased entirely. And nobody said a word. Jeanne, now ready to weep, got in noiselessly near her mother. The Baron, taken by surprise, sat dumbly opposite the two women; and Julien installed himself on the box, after lifting up near him the crying boy, whose cheek was swelling.

The road was dull and seemed long. There was silence in the carriage. All three of them were gloomy and embarrassed, and did not wish to confess what was busying their hearts. They felt they would not have been able to speak of anything else, so much did that painful thought weigh on them, and they preferred to remain dully silent than to touch on such a painful subject.

Drawn by the unequal strides of the two horses, the carriage went past the court-yards of farms, scared to quick flight some frightened black fowls which plunged into the hedges and vanished, and was sometimes followed by a yelping wolf-dog, which then went back to its kennel, with bristling

hair, turning round again to bark after the carriage. A lad in muddy *sabots*, with long, clumsy legs, who was walking with his hands in his pockets, and his blue blouse swelled out by the wind at the back, stood by to let the carriage pass, and awkwardly pulled off his cap, exposing his limp hair, which was glued to his skull.

And, between each farm, the meadows started again, with other farms, here and there, in the distance.

At last they entered a big avenue of firs bordering the road The deep, muddy ruts caused the carriage to bend over and the Baroness to utter little screams. At the end of the avenue was a closed white gate; Marius ran to open it, and, driving round an immense lawn, they arrived in front of a high, huge, dingy building, with its shutters up.

The central door quickly opened, and a paralyzed old servant, clad in a red waistcoat, striped with black, which was partly covered by his apron, descended the steps sideways with short paces. He took the names of the visitors, and introduced them into a spacious drawing-room; he drew up with difficulty the Venetian blinds that were always down. The furniture was covered up, the clock and candelabra enveloped in white linen; and a mouldy atmosphere, an atmosphere of "long ago," chilly and moist, seemed to impregnate lung, heart and skin with gloom.

They sat down and waited. Some footsteps, audible in the passage overhead, indicated that there was an unusual hurrying. The *châtelains* had been taken by surprise and were dressing as

quickly as possible. It took a long time. A bell tinkled several times. Other steps went down a staircase, then went up again.

The Baroness, chilled by the piercing cold, sneezed time after time. Julien walked to and fro. Jeanne, in a mournful mood, remained sitting by her mother. And the Baron, with his back against the marble mantelpiece, stood with his head lowered.

At last, one of the high doors opened, discovering the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville. They were both short, thin, fidgety, of uncertain age, formal and awkward. The wife, in a flowered silk dress, and a dowager cap with ribbons on her head, spoke quickly in a shrill voice.

The husband, tightly garbed in a showy coat, greeted them with a bend of the knee. His nose, his eyes, his gumless teeth, his hair, which might have been waxed, and his fine gala dress, shone as things do shine of which great care is taken.

After the first greetings and compliments, nobody found anything more to say. So, without any cause, they exchanged congratulations. It was hoped on both sides that such excellent relations would be continued. It was a pleasure to see people, when one lived the whole year in the country.

And the icy atmosphere of the drawing-room penetrated their bones, and made their voices hoarse. The Baroness was coughing now, without having quite stopped sneezing. So the Baron gave the signal for departure. The Brisevilles insisted. "What? So soon? Please stay a little longer." But Jeanne had got up, in spite of

Julien's signals, who thought the visit too short

They wanted to ring for the servant to order the carriage. The bell did not work. The master of the house rushed out, and presently came to say that the horses had been put in the stable.

They had to wait. Every one was trying to think of some phrase, some *mot*. They talked of the rainy winter. Jeanne, with involuntary shivers of anguish, asked what their hosts, who were alone, could find to do all the year round. But the Briseviles were astonished at the question; for they were always busy, writing much to their noble relations all over France, spending their days in microscopic occupations, ceremonious to one another as if in the presence of strangers, and talking majestically about the most insignificant affairs.

And beneath the high, blackened ceiling of the vast, uninhabited drawing-room, all packed up in linen, the man and woman, who were so small, so neat, so correct, appeared to Jeanne like preserves of nobility.

At last the carriage passed before the windows, with its two ill-matched horses But Marius had disappeared. Thinking himself free till the evening, he had no doubt gone off for an excursion in the country.

Julien, in a rage, asked that he might be sent back on foot; and, after much salutation on either side, they started again for Les Peuples.

As soon as they were safely in the carriage, Jeanne and her father, in spite of the haunting depression caused them by Julien's brutality, began laughing again as they imitated the gestures and

tones of the Brisevilles. The Baron imitated the husband, Jeanne the wife, but the Baroness, rather hurt in her feelings of respect, observed: "You are wrong to make game of them like that; they are very well-bred people, belonging to excellent families." They were silent, so as not to upset the Baroness, but, in spite of all, the Baron and Jeanne looked at each other now and then, and started again. He bowed ceremoniously, and said, in a solemn voice: "Your château, Les Peuples, must be very cold, Madame, with the strong sea-breeze that blows on it all day?" She put on a prim look, and said mincingly, with a slight wriggling of the head similar to that of a duck when bathing: "Oh! here, Monsieur, I have enough to occupy me the whole year. Besides, we have so many relations to write to. And M. de Briseville leaves everything on my shoulders. He is occupied in learned researches with the Abbé Pelle. They are writing together the religious history of Normandy."

The Baroness smiled also, she was both annoyed and amused, and repeated: "It isn't well to make fun of people of our class like that."

But the carriage all at once stopped; and Julien shouted, calling to some one behind. Jeanne and the Baron, leaning out at the carriage door, then caught sight of a singular being who appeared to be rolling towards them. His legs entangled in the floating skirt of his livery, blinded by his hat which was continually oversetting, waving his sleeves like the sails of a windmill, splashing in the broad puddles which he crossed in his bewilderment, stumbling against all the stones in the

road, hurrying, leaping and covered with mud, Marius was running after the carriage as quickly as his legs could manage it.

When he had caught it up, Julien, bending down, seized him by the coat-collar, dragged him up near him, and, dropping the reins, began to shower blows on the hat, which sounded like a drum, and crushed it down to the boy's shoulders. The youth cried out inside the hat, tried to run away, to jump down from the seat, whilst his master, gripping him with one hand, went on striking him with the other.

Jeanne, horror-struck, cried: "Father!—Oh! father!" and the Baroness, stirred with indignation, plucked her husband's arm. "But stop him, Jacques." Then the Baron suddenly let down the front window, and, catching hold of his son-in-law's sleeve, cried out in a voice trembling with anger: "Have you nearly finished striking that boy?"

Julien turned round in amazement: "But don't you see in what a state the beast has got his livery?"

"Well, what's it matter to me?" retorted the Baron, his head thrust out between the other two. "Such brutality is unpardonable." Julien again grew angry: "Leave me alone, please; it has nothing to do with you!" and he again raised his hand; but his father-in-law suddenly seized it and brought it down with such force that he flung it against the wood of the seat, and he shouted so vehemently: "If you don't stop, I shall get down myself, and make you stop!" that the Vicomte all at once became quiet, and, shrugging his shoul-

ders without answering, whipped up the horses, which began galloping.

The two women, livid of countenance, did not move, and the loud throbbing of the Baroness's heart could be distinctly heard.

At dinner Julien was more charming than usual, as if nothing had happened. Jeanne, her father and Madame Adélaïde, who quickly forgot things in their serene good-temper, and were delighted to see him at his best, abandoned themselves to gaiety with the feeling of well-being that convalescents have; and when Jeanne spoke again of the Brisevilles, her husband himself made jokes about them, but added quickly: "Still, they have the great manner."

They did not make any other visits, each of them fearing to revive the question of Marius. It was merely resolved that they should send their neighbours cards on New Year's day, and that they would put off their visits till the first warm days of the next spring.

Christmas came. They had the curé, the mayor and his wife to dinner. They were invited again for New Year's day. These were the only distractions that broke the regular monotony of the life.

The Baron and Baroness were to leave Les Peuples on January 9; Jeanne wanted them to stop, but Julien was hardly of the same mind, and the Baron, observing his son-in-law's increasing coldness, ordered a post-chaise from Rouen.

On the evening before their departure, as the packing was over, and the weather was clear and frosty, Jeanne and her father resolved to go down

to Yport, where they had not been since the return from Corsica.

They went through the wood which she had gone through on her marriage day, wrapt up wholly in the man whose life-long companion she became, the wood where she had received his first caress, had trembled with the first shiver of passion, had felt beforehand that sensual love which she was not finally to know till in the wild valley of Ota, near the spring at which they had drunk, mingling their kisses with the water.

There were no leaves, no climbing plants, nothing but the noise of the branches, and that dry creaking which is peculiar in winter to leafless copses.

They entered the little village. The empty, silent streets retained a smell of the sea, sea-weed, and fish. The huge brown nets were drying as before, hung up before the doors, or stretched on the beach. The grey, cold sea, with its eternal, rumbling foam, was beginning to go out, uncovering the greenish rocks at the foot of the cliffs near Fécamp. And along the beach the big boats lying on their sides looked like enormous dead fish. Night was falling, and the fishermen were coming down in groups to the sea, walking heavily in their big sea-boots, their necks wrapt in wool, a litre of brandy in one hand, the ship's lantern in the other. They walked a long time round about the shelving boats; with Norman slowness, they put on board their nets, their buoys, a big loaf, a jar of butter, a glass and the bottle of spirits. Then they would raise up and push a boat towards the sea: it went down the beach with a great

noise, dashed through the surf, rose up on a wave, balancing itself for a few moments, opened its brown wings, and vanished in the night with its little light at the end of the mast.

And the sailors' big wives, whose hard carcases jutted out under their thin dresses, stayed until the departure of the last fisherman, and then went back into the slumberous village, vexing with their noisy voices the heavy sleep of the black streets.

The Baron and Jeanne watched without moving these men go off into the shadows, who started off like that every night, risking death in order not to starve, and were yet so miserably poor that they never ate meat.

The Baron, growing enthusiastic over the ocean, murmured: "It is terrible and beautiful. How superb this sea is on which the darkness is falling, on which so many lives are in peril! isn't it, Jeannette?"

She answered with a watery smile: "It isn't up to the Mediterranean!" But her father cried indignantly: "The Mediterranean! It's mere oil, sugar-water, water made blue with a bucket of starch. Now look at this sea, how terrifying it is with its foam-crests! And think of all those men, who have sailed away on it, and are already out of sight."

Jeanne gave in with a sigh: "Yes, if you like." But the words, "The Mediterranean," which had passed her lips, had again sent a pang to her heart, throwing back her whole thought towards those distant lands, where her dreams lay entombed.

Father and daughter then, instead of returning by the thickets, took the high-road, and climbed down with slow steps. They hardly spoke at all, saddened by their coming separation.

Sometimes, as they passed the ditches of the farms, a smell of crushed apples, that odour of fresh cider which seems at that time of the year to hover over the whole of Normandy, struck them in the face, or, perchance, a strong stable perfume, that healthy, warm scent which is given off from cow-dung. A small lighted window at the bottom of the courtyard indicated the dwelling-house.

And it seemed to Jeanne that her soul was broadening, understanding things invisible; and those small lights, scattered over the fields, suddenly gave her a lively feeling of the isolation of all human beings, whom everything disunites, everything separates, everything draws far from what they would love.

Then, in resigned tones, she remarked: "It's not always merry, is life."

The Baron sighed: "Ah, well! my dear, we can't alter things."

And the next day, the Baron and Baroness having taken their leave and gone, Jeanne and Julien remained by themselves.

CHAPTER VII

The young people then took to card-playing. Every day, after lunch, Julien, whilst smoking his pipe and wetting his whistle with cognac, of which he gradually began drinking six or eight glasses, played several games of bézique with his wife. She afterwards went up to her room, sat near the window, and, whilst the rain beat against the panes and the wind rattled them, she would perseveringly embroider a petticoat flounce. When tired, she would at times raise her eyes and watch the sombre sea in the distance, which was covered with sea-horses. Then, after a few minutes of such vague contemplation, she took up her work again.

Besides, she had nothing else to do. Julien had taken over the whole management of the house, in order to gratify fully his need of authority, and his itch for economy. He displayed a ferocious parsimony, never gave "tips," reduced food to the strictly necessary; and as Jeanne, since she had come to Les Peuples, had a little Normandy cake made every morning by the baker, he put down that item of expense, and condemned her to toast.

She said nothing, in order to avoid explanations, arguments, and wranglings; but she suffered from each fresh manifestation of her husband's greed as

from pricks of a needle. It seemed to her low and loathsome, to her who had been brought up in a family with whom money counted as nothing. How often she had heard her mother say: "But it's made to be spent, is money." Julien would now nag her with: "So you will never accustom yourself not to throw money out of the windows?" And every time he had screwed a few sous off a salary or a bill, he remarked, with a smile, slipping the coins into his pocket: "Small streams make long rivers."

Still, Jeanne on certain days betook herself again to dreaming. She would slowly stop working, and, whilst her hands were slackened and her gaze obscured, she would conjure up again one of her romances as a little girl, going through delightful adventures. But Julien's voice, as he gave an order to old Simon, would sharply wake her up from such soothing dreams, and she would patiently take up her work again, saying to herself: "It's all over, all that;" and a tear would drop on her fingers which plied the needle.

Rosalie, too, who was formerly so cheerful, and used to be always singing, had changed. Her plump cheeks had lost their red polish; they were now almost hollow, and sometimes seemed as if rubbed in the earth.

Jeanne often asked her: "Are you ill, my dear?" The servant always replied: "No, Madame." Her cheek-bones coloured up slightly, and she made off as soon as possible.

Instead of running about as formerly, she dragged her legs about with difficulty, and appeared to have given up coquetry altogether; she

bought nothing now from the pedlars, who in vain displayed before her their silk ribbons and their corsets and their varied perfumeries.

And the big house had the appearance of sounding hollow, dingy as it was, with a front which the showers stained with their long grey trails.

At the end of January came the snow. From a distance you saw big clouds coming from the north over the sombre sea, and the descent of the white flakes began. In one night the whole plain was buried in them, and in the morning the trees appeared draped in that foam of ice.

Julien, looking rough and hairy, with his high boots on, spent the time at the bottom of the thicket, ambushed behind the ditch giving on to the heath, watching for the migrating birds. Now and then a gunshot broke the frozen silence of the fields, and troops of black crows were startled and flew out of the big trees, wheeling about.

Jeanne, yielding to boredom, would sometimes go down on the perron. What sounds of life there were came from a very great distance, echoed over the slumbering calmness of that livid, dull surface of snow.

Then she heard nothing more except a kind of murmur of distant waves, and the vague, continuous rustle of that dust of frozen water, ever falling.

And the bed of snow rose up unceasingly beneath the endless fall of that thick, light moss.

On one of those pale mornings, Jeanne was quietly warming her feet at the fire in her room, whilst Rosalie, who looked more changed in appearance every day, was slowly making the bed.

All of a sudden she heard a painful sigh behind her. Without turning her head, she asked: "What is the matter, there?"

The servant replied, as she always did: "Nothing, Madame;" but her voice seemed broken, gasping.

Jeanne was dreary, thinking about something else when she observed that she no longer heard the young woman moving. She called out: "Rosalie!" There was no movement. So, thinking she had gone out without making any noise, she cried out in a louder voice: "Rosalie!" and she was about to stretch out her arm to ring the bell, when a deep groan, uttered quite near her, caused her to start up with a shudder of anguish.

The maidservant, livid, with haggard eyes, was sitting on the ground, her legs stretched out, her back resting on the wood of the bed.

Jeanne rushed forward: "What's the matter with you? what's the matter with you?"

* * * * * *

Jeanne suddenly understood, and, losing her head, ran to the staircase, crying: "Julien! Julien!"

He answered from below: "What do you want?"

It was with great difficulty she was able to gasp: "It's—it's Rosalie who——"

Julien rushed up the stairs two at a time, and quickly entering the room, saw before him a hideous, creased little piece of flesh, whining, wrinkled, and clammy.

He rose up, with an evil expression, and, thrust-

ing his bewildered wife outside: "It's got nothing to do with you. Be off! Send me Ludivine and old Simon."

Jeanne, trembling, went down to the kitchen; then, not daring to go upstairs again, she went into the drawing-room, which had been without a fire since her parents' departure, and anxiously awaited the news.

She soon saw the servant leaving the house at running speed. Five minutes later he returned with Widow Dentu, the midwife of the district.

Then there was much moving about on the staircase, as if a wounded person were being carried, and Julien came to tell Jeanne that she might go up again to her room.

She was trembling as if she had just been present at some fearful accident. She sat down again before the fire, and asked: "How is she going on?"

Julien, who was pre-occupied and nervous, was walking round the room, and a fit of anger seemed to sweep over him. At first he did not answer; then he stopped, after a few seconds: "What do you think of doing with the girl?"

She did not understand, and looked at her husband: "What? What do you mean? I don't know."

And all of a sudden he exclaimed, as if he was carried away with rage: "Well, we can't keep a bastard in the house."

Whereat Jeanne was very much perplexed; then, after a long silence: "But, my dear, perhaps it might be put out to nurse?"

He did not allow her to finish: "And who will pay for it? You, I suppose?"

She again reflected a long time, seeking some way out; at last she said: "But the father will look after the child; and if he marries Rosalie, there is no more difficulty."

Julien replied, as if his patience was exhausted, in furious tones: "The father!—the father!—Do you know him?—the father?—No, you don't, eh? Well then?"

Jeanne, whose emotions were stirred, grew excited: "But he certainly shall not leave the girl like that. That would be too cowardly! We shall ask for his name, and we shall go and find him, and he will have to give an explanation."

Julien had calmed down, and started walking again: "My dear, she does not want to tell the man's name; she won't confess it to you, any more than to me—and if he does not want anything to do with her?—Why, we can't keep under our roof a spinster mother with her bastard, don't you understand?"

Jeanne repeated doggedly: "Well, then the man's a scoundrel; but we must know who he is, and then he will have us to deal with."

Julien, who had become very red, again flew into a passion: "But—meanwhile——?"

She did not know what measures to take, and asked him: "What do you propose?"

He at once gave his opinion; "Oh! I? It's very simple. I should give her some money and send her to the devil with her brat."

But the young wife indignantly protested. "I should never do that. The girl is my foster-sister;

we grew up together. She has committed a fault, unfortunately for her; but I shall not turn her out of doors for it; and, if necessary, I shall bring up the child myself."

Whereupon Julien burst out: "And we shall have a nice reputation, with our name and our relatives! And it will be gossipped everywhere that we protect vice, that we shelter drabs; and honourable people won't care about coming to visit us. But, really, what are you thinking of? You are off your head!"

She had remained calm. "I shall never allow Rosalie to be turned out; and if you don't wish to keep her, my mother will take her again; and we must finally get to know the name of her child's father."

Thereat he left the room in exasperation, slamming the door and shouting: "Women are stupid with their notions!"

In the afternoon Jeanne went up to the invalid's room. The maidservant, watched over by Widow Dentu, remained motionless in her bed, with her eyes open, whilst the nurse dandled the new-born babe in her arms.

As soon as she saw her mistress, Rosalie began sobbing, hiding her face in the sheets, all shaken with despair. Jeanne tried to kiss her, but she resisted and hid herself. The nurse then interfered and uncovered her face; and Rosalie let it be done, still weeping, though quietly.

A meagre fire was burning in the hearth; it was cold; the baby was crying. Jeanne did not dare to speak of it, for fear of bringing on another crisis; and she had taken her maid's hand, repeating in a

mechanical tone: "It does not matter, it does not matter." The poor girl looked furtively at the nurse, shuddered at the baby's cries; and a remnant of grief still stabbed her from time to time and burst out in a convulsive sobbing, whilst the tears she suppressed made a watery sound in her breast.

Jeanne kissed her once more, and in a low voice murmured in her ear: "Come, dear, we shall take good care of it." Then, when a fresh fit of crying began, she quickly took herself off.

She went to see her every day, and every day Rosalie burst out sobbing, when she caught sight of her mistress.

The baby was put to nurse with a neighbour.

Meanwhile Julien hardly spoke to his wife, as if he had cherished a deep grudge against her ever since she had refused to get rid of her maid. He returned one day to the subject, but Jeanne pulled out of her pocket a letter from the Baroness, asking that the girl should be sent to her immediately, if she were not retained at Les Peuples. Julien exclaimed in a rage: "Your mother is as crack-brained as you." But he no longer insisted on Rosalie's discharge.

A fortnight later the young mother was able to get up already, and set about her duties.

Now, Jeanne, one morning, made her sit down held her hands, and looking her full in the face:

"Look here, dear, tell me everything."

Rosalie began trembling, and gasped out:

"What, Madame?"

"To whom does the child belong?"

Thereupon the maid was overcome by an awful

despair; and tried in her fright to draw away her hands so as to hide her face.

Jeanne, however, kissed her in spite of her resistance, and comforted her: "It's a misfortune, dear, but it can't be helped. You have been weak; but it's happened to many others. If the father marries you, nobody will think any more about it; and we could take him into our service with you."

Rosalie groaned as if she had been tortured, and occasionally tried to shake heself free and run away.

Jeanne went on: "I can quite understand that you are ashamed: but you see that I am not angry, that I am talking gently to you. If I ask you the man's name, it is for your good, because I feel you are grieved that he is going to desert you, and I want to prevent it. Julien will go and find him, you know, and we shall compel him to marry you; and as we shall keep you both with us, we shall oblige him also to make you happy."

This time Rosalie struggled so hard that she wrenched her hands from her mistress's, and ran off like a mad woman.

In the evening Jeanne observed to Julien, as they were dining: "I wanted to persuade Rosalie to tell me her seducer's name. I did not succeed. Why don't you try yourself, so that we may force the rascal to marry her?"

But Julien at once lost his temper: "Well, do you know, I don't want to hear any more about that story. You wanted to keep the girl; well, keep her; but don't bother me any more about her."

Since the confinement, he seemed more irritable

than ever; and he had got into the habit, whenever he spoke to his wife, of shouting as if he was in a state of continuous rage, whilst she, on the contrary, lowered her voice, made herself gentle, conciliatory, in order to avoid any dispute; and she used often to cry in bed at night.

Despite his constant irritation, her husband had resumed the customs of love which he had forgotten since their return, and it was seldom he spent three successive nights without entering the conjugal door.

Rosalie was soon completely cured, and became less melancholy, although she remained as if terrified, haunted by an unknown fear.

And twice again she fled, when Jeanne tried to question her afresh.

Julien, too, appeared all at once more amiable; and the young wife began again to cling to vague hopes, to resume her cheery ways, although she sometimes felt herself suffering from strange fits of being unwell, about which she did not speak. The thaw had not come, and for nearly five weeks a sky, clear as the crystal by day, and studded at night with stars which you might have thought made of rime, so hard-bound was the vast space, stretched over the harmonious, hard surface of the ground, glittering with snow.

The farms, isolated in their square court-yards, behind their curtains of big trees powdered with rime, seemed to have gone to sleep in their white gowns. Neither men nor animals went out of doors; the chimneys of the cottages alone revealed their hidden life by slender threads of smoke that rose up straight in the icy air.

The plain, the hedges, the elms of the enclosure, all appeared dead, killed by the cold. From time to time you could hear the trees cracking, as if their wooden limbs had been broken beneath the bark; and sometimes a large branch became detached and fell, when the irresistible frost had petrified the sap and burst the fibres.

Jeanne was anxiously awaiting the return of warm winds, attributing to the terrible severity of the weather all the vague pains that troubled her.

Sometimes she could not eat anything, and was disgusted at any kind of food: now her pulse beat wildly; now her scanty meals caused vomiting through indigestion; and her tense nerves, continually vibrating, made of her life one constant, intolerable agitation.

One evening the thermometer sank lower, and Julien, shivering as he left the table (for the room was never heated enough, so much did he economise on wood), rubbed his hands, murmuring: "It would be nice to sleep together to-night, eh, darling?"

He laughed with his old good-humoured laugh, and Jeanne threw her arms round his neck; but she positively felt that night so unwell, in such pain, so strangely nervous, that she begged him in a whisper, kissing his lips, to let her sleep by herself. She told him of her ill-health in a few words: "I beg you, my sweet; I assure you I am not well. I shall be better to-morrow, no doubt."

He did not insist: "As you please, my dear; if you are unwell, I must take care of you."

And they talked about other things.

She went to bed early. Julien, for a wonder, had a fire lit in his bedroom. When the servant announced "It's burning up well," he kissed his wife on the forehead, and went off.

The entire house seemed pierced by the cold; the walls made little noises like shudders, and Jeanne shivered in her bed.

Twice she got up to put more logs on the fire, and to look out dresses, skirts, and old garments, which she piled up on her bed. She could not get warm; her feet grew numb, whilst her calves and thighs twitched so much that she had continually to turn over, in an excess of nervous excitement.

Presently her teeth chattered; her hands trembled; her chest grew tight; her heart beat slowly with great dull throbs, and appeared now and then to stop, and her lungs panted as if the air could not get into them.

A fearful anguish took hold of her soul at the same time that the unconquerable cold pierced her to the marrow. She had never experienced it before, never had she felt so abandoned by life, ready to breathe her last breath.

She thought: "I'm going to die—I'm dying."

And panic-stricken she jumped out of bed, rang for Rosalie, waited, rang again, waited again, trembling and frozen.

The maid did not come. Doubtless she was sleeping that sound first sleep, which nothing interrupts; and Jeanne, losing her head, darted out bare-footed on to the staircase.

She went up noiselessly, feeling her way, found the door, opened it, and cried: "Rosalie!" She went on, stumbled against the bed, passed her

hands over it, and discovered that it was empty. It was empty and quite cold, as if nobody had slept in it.

Astonished, she thought: "What? Could she actually have gone for a walk in such weather?"

And as her heart on a sudden beat madly, and throbbed fiercely enough to threaten suffocation, she went down again, her legs giving way under her, in order to wake up Julien.

She rushed into his room, goaded by the conviction that she was about to die, and desiring to see him before losing consciousness.

By the light of the dying fire she saw Rosalie's head on the pillow by the side of her husband's.

At the scream she uttered, they both started up. She remained a moment without moving, in the fright of her discovery. Then she fled back to her room; and when Julien, horror-stricken, called out "Jeanne!" so awful was her fear of seeing him, of hearing his voice, of listening to his explanation, his lies, of looking him square in the face, that she rushed again down the stairs.

She was now running in the dark, at the risk of rolling down the steps, of breaking her limbs on the stone. She dashed straight ahead, pursued by an imperative need of flight, of understanding nothing more, of seeing no one any more.

When she was at the bottom, she sat down on a step, barefooted and still in her night-gown; and there she remained, her mind dazed.

Julien had jumped out of bed, was hastily dressing. She heard him moving, walking. She got up to run away from him. He was already coming downstairs, and cried: "Listen, Jeanne!"

No, she did not want to listen and let herself be touched by the tips of his fingers; and she flung into the dining-room, running as if from a murderer. She looked for an outlet, a hiding-place, a dark corner, a means of escaping him. She crouched under the table. But he was already opening the door, candle in hand, repeating again and again: "Jeanne!" and she started off again like a hare, dashed into the kitchen, flew twice round it like an animal at bay; and, as he was getting near her again, she suddenly opened the garden-door, and dashed into the open country.

The icy touch of the snow, in which her bare legs sometimes sank up to the knees, gave her all at once a desperate energy. She was not cold, although she had practically nothing on; she no longer felt anything, to such a degree had the convulsion of her soul benumbed her body, and she ran on, white as the ground.

She followed the big alley, went through the wood, crossed the ditches, and made off over the heath.

No moon; the stars glittered like seeds of fire in the black of the sky; but still the plain was bright with a lack-lustre whiteness, fixedly motionless, infinitely silent.

Jeanne went quickly, without taking breath, without knowing or thinking of anything. And all at once she found herself at the edge of the cliff. She stopped short instinctively, and crouched down, empty of all thought and of all will.

In the sombre gap in front of her, the invisible, dumb sea was exhaling the briny smell of seaweed at ebb-tide.

She remained there a long time, inert in mind and body; then suddenly she began to tremble, to tremble distractedly, like a sail caught by the wind. Her arms, her hands, her feet, shaken by an invisible force, throbbed and twitched with hurried convulsions; and consciousness quickly returned to her, clear and poignant.

Next, visions of old times passed before her eyes; that trip with *him* in old Lastique's boat, their talk, their growing love, the christening of the barque; then she went further back, to the dream-rocked night of her arrival at Les Peuples. And now! now! Oh, her life was broken, all joy was ended, all hope impossible; and the awful future appeared to her, full of torture, treachery and despair. She might as well die and finish with it at once.

But a voice shouted afar off: "Here, here are her steps; quick, quick, here!" It was Julien looking for her.

Oh! she did not want to see him again. There in the abyss in front of her, she now heard a slight noise, the vague gliding of the sea over the rocks.

She got up, determined now to throw herself over; and, in a despairing good-bye to life, she moaned the last word of the dying, the last word of young soldiers who have been mangled in battle: "Mother!"

The thought of her mother suddenly struck her; she saw her sobbing; she saw her father on his knees before her mutilated body, she endured for a moment all the suffering of their despair.

She then fell down softly in the snow; and she did not make off, when Julien and old Simon, followed by Marius holding a lantern, took her by the arms in order to throw her backwards, so near was she to the edge.

They did with her what they pleased, for she was unable to move. She felt them carrying her, then laying her in a bed, then rubbing her with hot cloths; then all memory was blotted out, all consciousness vanished.

Then a nightmare—was it a nightmare?—possessed her. She was lying in her room. It was day, but she could not get up. Why? She did not know. Then she heard a faint noise on the floor, a kind of scratching, rustling, and suddenly a mouse, a small grey mouse, darted quickly over the sheet. Another speedily followed, then a third, which ran towards her breast with a lively little trot. Jeanne was not afraid: but she wanted to take hold of the animal, and put out her hand, without success.

Next came other mice, ten, twenty, hundreds, thousands, from every side. They climbed the bedposts, ran over the tapestry, covered the whole bed. And soon they got beneath the sheets; Jeanne felt them gliding over her skin, tickling her legs, go up and down her body. She saw them coming from the foot of the bed to get inside on to her breast; and she struggled, stretched her hands out to seize one of them, and found them always empty.

She grew irritated, wanted to run away, cried out, and it appeared to her she was being prevented from moving, that strong arms were

wound round her and paralyzed her; but she saw nobody.

She had no idea of time. It must have lasted long, very long.

Next, she had an awakening; tired she was and aching, but yet comfortable. She felt she was weak, weak. She opened her eyes, and was not astonished to see her mother sitting in the room, with a big man she did not know.

How old was she? She did not know, and thought herself quite a little girl. Nor had she any memory.

The big man said: "Look! she is becoming conscious again." And her mother began weeping.

Then the big man went on: "Come! be calm, Baroness, I tell you I can answer for her now. But don't speak to her about anything, anything. Let her sleep."

And it seemed to Jeanne that she lived still a very long time in a doze, overcome by a heavy slumber as soon as she tried to think; and she did not try any more to remember anything at all, as if she was vaguely afraid of the real state of things coming back to her brain.

Now, on one occasion, when she awoke, she saw Julien by himself near her; and all at once everything came back to her, as if a curtain, hiding her past life, had been raised.

She had a horrible pain in her heart and wanted to run away again. She threw back her clothes, jumped on the floor, and fell down, her legs being unable to support her.

Julien rushed up to her; and she began groaning aloud that he should not touch her. She

writhed, rolled about. The door opened. Aunt Lison hastened in with Widow Dentu; then the Baron, then at last the Baroness arrived, out of breath, in a fright.

Jeanne was put to bed again; and she immediately closed her eyes cunningly, so as not to speak and to reflect at her ease.

Her mother and aunt tended her, busied about her, inquired: "Do you hear us now, Jeanne, my little Jeanne?"

She pretended to be deaf, and did not answer; and she saw clearly it was the end of the day. Night came. The nurse sat near her, and made her drink now and then

She drank without saying anything, but she did not sleep, she reasoned with difficulty, seeking for the things that escaped her as if she had had holes in her memory, big white, empty spots where events had left no mark

Gradually, after long strivings, she recovered all the facts.

And she meditated on them with resolute perseverance.

Her mother, Aunt Lison and the Baron had come; therefore she had been very ill. But Julien? What had he said? Did her parents know? And Rosalie? Where was she? And now what should she do? What should she do? An idea flashed across her--she would return with her father and mother to Rouen, as of old. She would be a widow: that was all.

She then waited, listening to what was said around her, understanding very well without letting it be seen, enjoying the return of reason, patient and astute.

In the evening she at last found herself alone with the Baroness, and called to her in a whisper: "Mother!" Her own voice astonished her, seemed to her altered. The Baroness took hold of her hands: "My daughter! my darling Jeanne! My daughter, do you recognize me?"

"Yes, mother, but you must not cry; we have a lot to talk about. Has Julien told you why I ran away in the snow?"

"Yes, my darling, you have had a violent, very dangerous fever."

"It isn't that, mamma. I had the fever afterwards; but has he told you what gave me the fever, and why I ran away?"

"No, my sweet."

"It was because I found Rosalie in his bed."

The Baroness believed she was still delirious, and caressed her. "Sleep, my love, calm yourself, try to sleep."

But Jeanne rejoined resolutely: "I am now perfectly in my senses, mother; I am not talking nonsense, as I must have done during the last few days. I felt ill one night, so I went to look for Julien. Rosalie was in bed with him. I lost my head with grief, and ran away in the snow in order to throw myself over the cliff."

But the Baroness repeated: "Yes, my love, you've been ill, very ill."

"It isn't that, mamma; I found Rosalie in Julien's bed, and I don't want to stop with him. You will take me with you to Rouen, as you did formerly."

The Baroness, whom the doctor had advised

not to contradict Jeanne in anything, answered: "Yes, my darling."

But the invalid grew impatient.

"I see clearly you don't believe me Go and fetch father, he will at last understand me."

And her mother got up with difficulty, took her two walking-sticks, went out, dragging her feet after her, then came back after a few minutes with the Baron, who supported her

They sat down before the bed and Jeanne immediately began. She told everything quietly, clearly, in a feeble voice, Julien's odd character, his harshnesses, his avarice, and, finally, his infidelity.

When she had finished, the Baron saw right enough that her mind was not wandering, but he did not know what to say, what to decide, and what to answer

He took her hand affectionately in his, as he used to do formerly, when he sent her off to sleep with fairy stories.

"Listen, my sweet, we must act with prudence. Don't let us do anything hastily, try to endure your husband until we shall have decided on something. Do you promise?"

She murmured "Very good but I shall not stop here when I am well again"

Then she added in a low voice: "Where is Rosalie now?"

The Baron rejoined: "You won't see her again." But she persevered. "Where is she? I want to know" Then he confessed that she had not left the house; but he asserted she was about to go.

On leaving the sick-room, the Baron, in a heat with wrath, wounded in his fatherly heart, went to find Julien, and told him outright:

"Sir, I come to ask you for an explanation of your behaviour to my daughter You have been false to her with your servant—which is doubly scandalous."

Julien, however, played the innocent, gave a passionate denial, swore, called God to witness. Besides, what proof had they? Was not Jeanne off her head? had she not just had brain fever? did she not run away in the snow one night, in a fit of delirium, at the beginning of her illness? And it was right in the middle of that fit, when she was running over the house almost naked, that she pretended she had seen her maid in her husband's bed!

And he grew angry, he threatened an action; he became violently enraged And the Baron in confusion apologized, begged pardon, and stretched out his loyal hand, which Julien refused to take.

When Jeanne knew her husband's answer, she was not vexed, and replied: "He is lying, papa, but we shall at length convict him of it."

And for two days she was taciturn, brooding, meditating.

Then, on the third day, she desired to see Rosalie. The Baron refused to ask the maid up, stated that she had left. Jeanne did not give way, repeating. "Well then, let somebody go and look her up where she is living."

And she was already exasperated when the doctor entered. He was told everything, so that

he might give his opinion. Jeanne, however, suddenly began crying, excited beyond measure, almost shouting: "I want to see Rosalie, I want to see her!"

The doctor then took her by the hand, and in a low voice: "Calm yourself, Madame; any excitement might be serious, because you are *enceinte*."

She was dazed, as if struck by a blow; and it seemed to her all at once that something was moving within her. Then she remained silent, not even listening to what they said, buried in thought. She could not sleep at night, kept awake by the new and strange idea that a child was living there, in her womb; and she was sad, troubled that it was Julien's son; restless, afraid it might resemble its father. When day came, she sent for the Baron. "Father, my resolve is taken; I wish to know everything, especially now; you understand, I wish it; and you know you must not contradict me in my present condition. Listen to me. Go and fetch M. le Curé. I have need of him to prevent Rosalie from lying; then, as soon as he has come, you will ask her to come up and you will remain here with mother. Take particular care that Julien has no suspicions."

An hour later the priest entered, fatter than ever, panting as hard as the Baroness. He sat down near her in an arm-chair, his stomach falling between his open legs; and he began by joking, wiping his forehead from habit with his checked handkerchief: "Well, Madame la Baronne, I don't think we are getting thinner; it seems to me there's a fine pair of us." Then, turning to the invalid's bed: "Eh, eh, my young

lady, what is it they're saying, that we shall soon be having a new christening? Ha! ha! ha! not a boat, this time." And he added seriously: "It will be a defender for our country"; then, after a brief interval of thought: "unless it is a good materfamilias"; and, bowing to the Baroness, "like you, Madame."

But the door at the end of the room opened. Rosalie, frightened, crying, refused to enter, clinging to the frame of the door. The Baron was pushing her in, and, in his impatience, he hurled her into the room with a jerk. She then covered her face with her hands and remained standing, shaken with sobs.

Jeanne, as soon as she saw her, started up and sat down, paler than the sheets; and her heart, beating wildly, stirred up the thin chemise clinging to her skin. She could not speak, she breathed with difficulty, she gasped. At last she uttered in a voice broken by emotion: "I—I—don't—don't want to question you. It—it—is enough that I see you like that—to—to see your—your shame in my presence."

After a pause, for she was out of breath, she went on: "But I want to know everything—everything. I have asked M. le Curé to come so that it might be like a confession, you understand?"

Standing motionless, Rosalie almost shrieked between her clenched hands.

The Baron, who was getting angry, seized her arms, tore them violently asunder, and, throwing her on her knees by the bed, said: "Speak—answer!"

She remained on the ground, in the position

usually assigned to Mary Magdalene, her cap awry, her apron on the floor, her face hidden again now that her hands were free.

Whereupon the Curé: "Come, my girl, listen to what is being said to you, and answer. We don't want to hurt you; but we wish to know what happened."

Jeanne, leaning on the edge of her bed, gazed at her. She said: "It's certainly true you were in Julien's bed, when I surprised you."

Rosalie moaned through her hands: "Yes, Madame."

Then, all at once, the Baroness began weeping too, with a loud sound of stifling; and her convulsive sobs accompanied Rosalie's.

Jeanne, her eyes fixed on her maid, asked: "Since when had it been going on?"

Rosalie stammered: "Since he came."

Jeanne did not understand. "Since he came —well—since—since the spring?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Since he came to the house?"

"Yes, Madame."

And Jeanne, as if oppressed with questions, inquired in a hurried voice:

"But how did it happen? how did he ask you? How did he get hold of you? What did he say to you? At what moment, how did you give in? how could you give yourself to him?"

And Rosalie, taking away her hands this time, was also seized with a feverish desire to speak, a need to answer.

"How do I know? It was the day he dined here the first time that he came and found me in

my room. He had hidden in the garret. I didn't dare to cry out for fear of making a fuss."

Jeanne cried out, and asked:

"But—your—your child—is it his?——"

Rosalie sobbed.

"Yes, Madame."

Then they were both silent.

You could hear nothing but the noise of Rosalie's and the Baroness's tears.

Jeanne, overcome in her turn, felt her eyes overflowing; and the drops streamed noiselessly down her cheeks.

Her maid's child had the same father as her own! Her wrath had evaporated. She now felt herself penetrated by a dull, slow, deep, endless despair.

She at last resumed in a changed, softened voice, the voice of a woman weeping:

"When we returned from—from there—from the journey—when did he begin again?"

The girl, crushed to the earth, gasped: "The—the first night he came."

Every word rung Jeanne's heart. So, on the first night, the night of their return to Les Peuples, he had left her for this girl. That was why he let her sleep alone!

She now knew enough, she did not want to know any more; she screamed "Go! Go!" and as Rosalie, nearly dead, did not budge, Jeanne called to her father: "Take her away! take her away!"

The Curé, however, who had said nothing up till then, thought the moment had come for a little sermon.

"You've done great evil, my girl, great evil;

and the good God will not quickly forgive you. Think of Hell which awaits you, if you don't henceforth behave properly. Now, whilst you are young, you must put yourself straight. Madame le Baronne will no doubt do something for you, and we will find you a husband——"

He would have spoken a long time, but the Baron, seizing Rosalie again by the shoulders, lifted her, dragged her to the door, and threw her into the passage like a parcel.

When he had returned, looking paler than his daughter, the Curé resumed: "Well, well; they are all like that in the country. It is lamentable, but there's nothing to be done, and, after all, one must make some allowance for the weaknesses of human nature. The girls never marry without being *enceintes*, never, Madame." And he added, smiling: "You would think it was a local custom." Then, indignantly: "It's the same even with the children. Why, I found last year together in the cemetery two little children, a boy and a girl, belonging to my catechism class! I told the parents! Do you know what their answer was? 'Well, M. le Curé, it wasn't us that taught 'em such dirty things, we can't help it.' You see, Monsieur, your maid has done like the others."

But the Baron, trembling with excitement, broke in: "She? what do I care about her? it's Julien who makes me furious. He's a scoundrel to do it, and I shall take my daughter away."

And he walked about, continually working himself up in his exasperation: "He's a scoundrel to have deceived my daughter like that, a scoundrel! He's a cad, a scamp, a villain; and I'll

tell him so, I'll box his ears, I'll kill him with my stick!"

The priest, however, who was slowly sniffing in a pinch of snuff by the side of the weeping Baroness, and was seeking how to fulfil his office of peace-maker, went on: "You see, M. le Baron, he has, between ourselves, acted like everybody else. Do you know many husbands who are faithful?" And he added, with sly good-humour: "Come, I'll bet you've sown your wild oats. Come, your hand on your conscience, is it true?" The Baron had stopped in confusion before the priest, who continued: "Why, yes, you have done like the others. Who knows even if you ever tried your hand at a servant like Rosalie? I say that everybody does the same. Was your wife less happy or less beloved?"

The Baron was motionless in his bewilderment.

By Jove! it was true he had done the same, and frequently too, as often as he could; nor had he respected the conjugal roof; and, when they were pretty, he had never hesitated about his wife's maids! Was he on that account a scamp? Why did he judge Julien's conduct so strictly, when he had never even dreamt that his own might be culpable?

And the Baroness, out of breath as she still was with sobbing, had a shadow of a smile on her lips at the remembrance of her husband's escapades; for she belonged to the sentimental type, which is quickly moved to tenderness and kindliness, and, for her, love-adventures formed a part of life.

Jeanne, exhausted, her eyes looking in front of

her, stretched on her back, with arms inert, was thinking in anguish. She was haunted by a phrase of Rosalie, which hurt her soul and pierced her heart like a gimlet: "I said nothing because I thought him lovely."

She, too, had thought him "lovely"; and it was on that account alone that she had yielded herself, bound herself for life, that she had given up all other hopes, all other ideas, all the unknown of the morrow. She had fallen into that marriage, into that hole without sides by which to climb up again, into that gloom, that wretchedness, that despair, because, like Rosalie, she had thought him "lovely"!

The door was violently flung open. Julien appeared with a savage look. He had perceived Rosalie moaning on the staircase, and he came to know why it was, understanding that some plot was being hatched, that the girl had doubtless spoken. The sight of the priest nailed him to the spot.

He asked in a shaky, but calm voice: "What is the matter?" The Baron, who was so violent a short while before, did not dare to say anything, fearing the priest's argument and that his own example might be quoted by his son-in-law. The Baroness wept more copiously; but Jeanne had raised herself on her hands, and gazed, panting, at the man who was the cause of her cruel sufferings. She gasped out: "The fact is that we are no longer ignorant, that we are aware of all your scoundrelism since—since the day on which you entered this house—you have a child by the servant—just—just like one by me—they will be

brothers——" And, overcome by an excess of anguish at the thought, she buried herself in the clothes and cried in a frenzy.

He stood open-mouthed, not knowing what to say or do. The curé again intervened.

"Come, come, don't let us distress ourselves as much as that, my dear young lady; be reasonable." He got up, approached the bed, and placed his warm hand on the forehead of the despairing woman. The mere touch soothed her strangely; she immediately felt more languid, as if that strong countryman's hand, accustomed to gestures of absolution, to comforting caresses, had brought a mysterious peacefulness with its touch.

The worthy man remained standing, and resumed: "Madame, we must always forgive. Here's a great misfortune that has happened to you; but God, in His pity, has balanced it by a great happiness, since you are about to become a mother. This child will be your consolation. In its name I implore you, I adjure you to forgive M. Julien his sin. It will be a new bond between you, a pledge of his future faithfulness. Can you remain separated from the heart of him whose child you are carrying in your womb?"

She did not reply; she now felt crushed, exhausted, and in pain, and no longer had enough strength for anger and resentment. Her nerves seemed to her all to pieces, relaxed; she was hardly alive.

The Baroness, to whom resentment seemed impossible, and whose soul was incapable of a prolonged effort, murmured: "Come, Jeanne."

The curé then took the young man's hand,

and drawing him near the bed, placed it in his wife's hand. He gave them a little tap on the top, as if to unite them once and for all; and, laying aside his preaching and professional tone, he said contentedly: "Well, it's all over; believe me, it's the best thing to do."

Then the two hands, which had closed for a moment, immediately separated. Julien, not venturing to embrace Jeanne, kissed his mother-in-law on the forehead, turned on his heels, and took the Baron by the arm, who did not mind, glad at bottom that the affair had been settled like that; and they went out together to smoke a cigar.

Then the invalid, worn out, went to sleep, whilst the priest and her mother quietly chatted in a low voice.

The abbé spoke, explaining, developing his ideas; and the Baroness nodded assent the whole time. At last he observed in conclusion: "Well then, it's understood; you will give this girl the Barville farm, and I shall take it upon myself to find her a husband, a good, well-behaved fellow. Why, with a property of 20,000 francs, we shall not lack applicants. In fact, we shall have a difficulty in choosing out of the crowd."

And the Baroness was now smiling, quite happy; two tears had remained *en route* on her cheeks, but their moist track had already dried.

She persisted: "Of course, Barville is worth at least 20,000 francs; but the estate will be settled on the child; the parents shall enjoy it during their life-time."

And the curé rose up and shook the Baroness's

hand: "Don't disturb yourself, Madame la Baroness, don't disturb yourself; I know what a step costs."

As he went out, he met Aunt Lison coming to see her patient. She noticed nothing, she was told nothing, and, as usual, she knew nothing.

CHAPTER VIII

Rosalie had left the house, and Jeanne was fulfilling the grief-stricken period of her pregnancy. She felt no pleasure at heart in knowing she was a mother; too many sorrows had overwhelmed her. She expected her child without curiosity, burdened as she still was by the fear of undefined calamities.

Spring had come gently. The bare trees shivered at the wind, which was still chilly, but in the damp grass of the ditches, where the autumn leaves were rotting, yellow primroses began to show themselves. From the whole plain, from the farmyards, from the drenched fields, rose a smell of moisture, like a flavour of fermenting. And a number of little green points emerged from the brown earth, and glistened in the sunbeams.

A big woman, built like a fortress, had taken Rosalie's place, and supported the Baroness in her monotonous walks along the alley, where the track of her now heavier foot was always damp and muddy.

Her father gave his arm to Jeanne, who was now weighed down with continual pain; and Aunt Lison, who was restless and anxious about the coming event, held her hand on the other side, troubled by the mystery which she was never to know.

They all walked about like that, and hardly spoke for hours, whilst Julien rode about over the country, a new taste he had suddenly developed.

There was nothing more to disturb their dull life. The Baron, the Baroness, and the Viscount paid a visit to the Fourvilles, with whom Julien seemed to be already well acquainted, without explaining exactly how. Another formal visit was paid to the Brisevilles, who were as usual concealed in their slumbering manor-house.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, when a man and woman on horseback trotted into the court in front of the château, Julien went into Jeanne's room in great excitement. "Quick! quick! come down! Here are the Fourvilles. They have simply come as neighbours, knowing your condition. Say I've gone out, but am expected back. I am going to make myself a bit tidy."

Jeanne was astonished, and went down. A pale, pretty woman, with a sad face, enthusiastic eyes, and hair of a dead blonde, as if it had never been caressed by a sunbeam, quietly introduced her husband, a species of giant, of ogre, with big red moustaches. She then remarked: "We have several times had the opportunity of meeting M. de Lamare. We know through him how ill you are; and we did not wish to delay any longer coming to see you as neighbours, without any ceremony. Besides, you see, we rode here. I had also, the other day, the pleasure of receiving a visit from your mother and the Baron."

She spoke with an infinite ease, which was familiar and refined. Jeanne was carried away,

and at once adored her. "There's a friend," she thought.

The Comte de Fourville, on the other hand, seemed like a bear which had strayed into a drawing-room. When he sat down, he placed his hat on a chair near by, hesitated some time as to what he should do with his hands, rested them on his knees, on the arms of his chair, and finally crossed his fingers as if for a prayer.

Julien all at once came in. Jeanne was taken aback, and hardly recognized him. He had shaved. He was handsome, elegant and charming as in the time of their betrothal. He shook the Comte's hairy paw, who seemed woken up by his arrival, and kissed the hand of the Comtesse, whose ivory cheek flushed a bit, whilst her eyelids trembled.

He spoke. He was as amiable as he used to be. His big eyes, mirrors of love, had become again caressing; and his hair, which but just now looked dull and rough, had suddenly grown again soft, glistening and wavy, with the help of his brush and perfumed oil.

When the Fourvilles were going, the Comtesse turned to him: "My dear Vicomte, would you like to come for a ride on Thursday?"

Then, whilst he bowed, murmuring: "Certainly, madame;" she took Jeanne's hand, and said in a tender, penetrating voice, with an affectionate smile: "Ah! when you are quite well, we three shall have some gallops over the country. It will be delightful, don't you think so?"

With a graceful gesture she lifted the skirt of her riding-habit, and she was in the saddle with the lightness of a bird, whilst her husband, after

awkwardly taking leave, bestrode his big Norman steed, as much at home on it as a centaur.

When they had turned the corner and vanished, Julien, who seemed enchanted, exclaimed: "What charming people! It's worth making such acquaintances as that."

Jeanne, who was also satisfied, without knowing why, answered: "The little Comtesse is ravishing; I feel I shall love her; but the husband looks like a brute. Where did you get to know them?"

He cheerfully rubbed his hands: "I met them by chance at the Brisevilles. The husband seems rather rough. He is mad on sport, but he's a real gentleman."

And the dinner was almost joyful, as if some hidden happiness had entered the house.

And nothing fresh happened till the last days of July.

One Tuesday evening, as they were sitting under the plane, round a wooden table on which were two liqueur glasses and a decanter of brandy, Jeanne suddenly uttered a kind of scream, and, becoming very pale, put her hands to her sides. A quick, sharp pain had all at once run through her, and then had forthwith left off.

After ten minutes, however, another pain shot through her, which lasted longer, though it was less acute. She had great difficulty in getting back to the house, and was almost carried by her father and husband. The brief crossing from the plane to her room appeared endless to her, and she groaned in spite of herself, asking them to let her sit down, to stop, overcome by an intolerable sensation of heaviness in the womb.

It was not her time for confinement—it was only expected in September; but as there might be accident, a carriage was got ready, and old Simon started off at a gallop for the doctor.

He came about midnight, and forthwith recognized the symptoms of a premature confinement.

Now that Jeanne was in bed, her sufferings were not quite so severe, but she was a prey to an awful anguish, a despairing faintness through her whole being, something like the presentiment, the mysterious touch of death. There are such moments in which death is so near that its breath turns the heart to ice.

The room was full of people. The Baroness, buried in an armchair, was stifling. The Baron, whose hands trembled, ran about everywhere, brought things, consulted the doctor, had lost his head. Julien walked to and fro, with a preoccupied look, but his brain was calm; and Widow Dentu stood at the foot of the bed with a suitable expression—the expression of an experienced woman, whom nothing astonishes. Nurse, midwife and watcher over the dead, receiving the children as they come, welcoming their first cry, washing their fresh skin in their first bath, wrapping them in their first linen; presently, listening with the same calm to the last word, the last death-rattle, the last shudder of the dying, dressing them, too, for the last time, sponging their wasted bodies with vinegar, enveloping them in their last sheet; she had become inured and unconquerably indifferent to all the accidents of birth or death.

The cook, Ludivine, and Aunt Lison were discreetly hidden by the hall-door.

And the patient now and then uttered a faint moan.

For two hours you might have believed that the birth would be a long time taking place; but about daybreak the pain became violent again, and soon grew terrible.

And Jeanne, whose involuntary cries burst forth between her clenched teeth, continually thought of Rosalie, who had not suffered at all, who had hardly even groaned, whose child—the bastard child—had been born without pain and without tortures.

In her anguished, troubled soul, she made an incessant comparison between them, and she cursed God, whom she had once thought just; she was indignant at the culpable preferences of fate, and at the criminal lives of those who preach uprightness and goodness. The crisis sometimes became so agonizing that the power of thinking died out in her. She had only strength, life, consciousness, in order to suffer.

During the moments of relief, she could not keep her eyes off Julien; and another pain—a pain of the soul—racked her as she recalled the day on which her maid had fallen at the foot of this same bed with her child, the brother of the little being who was so soon to come into the world. She remembered as clear as daylight her husband's gestures, looks, words, in connection with the prostrate girl, and she now read in him, just as if his thoughts had been written in his movements—she read the same boredom, the same indifference to her as to the other; the same carelessness of a selfish man, whom paternity irritates.

But a fearful convulsion seized her, a spasm so excruciating that she told herself: "I am going to die. I'm dying!" A furious revolt, a need for cursing, then filled her soul, and an exasperation of hatred for the man who had deceived her, and for the unknown child which was killing her.

The nurse and the doctor bent over her, handled her. They took away something; and soon the stifled noise, which she had already heard, startled her; afterwards, the little cry of pain, the weak whine of the new-born child, entered her soul, her heart, all her poor exhausted body, and she tried, with an unconscious gesture, to hold out her arms.

There had just come to her a glimpse of joy, an impulse towards a new happiness. In one second she found herself saved, soothed, happy, happy as she had never been before. Her heart and her flesh revived; she felt herself a mother!

From that time she had only one thought—her child. She suddenly became a fanatical mother, and was the more enthusiastic because she had been betrayed in her love, deceived in her hopes. She always wanted the cradle near her bed, and presently, when she was able to get up, she remained for whole days sitting at the window, near the light bed which she rocked.

She was jealous of the nurse, and when the baby, grown thirsty, stretched its arms towards her big breast with its bluish veins, she looked, pale and trembling, at the strong, calm peasant-woman, with the longing to snatch her son from her, and to strike, to tear with her nails the bosom which he was greedily sucking.

Then it was her wish herself to embroider fine

dresses for his adornment, elaborately elegant. He was enveloped in a cloud of lace, and wore magnificent caps. She talked about nothing else, interrupted conversations in order to attract admiration to a swaddling-cloth, a bib, or some unusually figured ribbon, and, listening to nothing that was being said around her, she would go into raptures over some bits of linen, which she would turn round a long time in her hand, which she raised to see the stuff better; then she would suddenly query: "Do you think he'll be lovely in that?"

The Baron and Baroness smiled at her wild affection, but Julien, disturbed in his habits, diminished in his dominating importance by the coming of this noisy and all-powerful tyrant, unconsciously jealous of this bit of a man who was robbing him of his place in the house, exclaimed again and again, in his impatience and wrath: "She's enough to kill one with her brat!"

She was soon so obsessed by her love, that she spent whole nights sitting near the cradle and watching the little one sleep. As she became exhausted by this morbid mania of watching, and took no rest, whilst growing weak, thin, and subject to coughing, the doctor ordered her to be separated from her son.

She was sulky, wept, implored; but they were deaf to her entreaties. He was placed every evening near his nurse, and every night the mother got up, bare-footed, and went and glued her ear to the key-hole to hear if he was sleeping quietly, if he was not waking up, if he did not want something.

She was once found there by Julien, who came

home late, after dining with the Fourvilles, and she was thenceforward locked in her room in order to oblige her to go to bed.

The christening took place about the end of August. The Baron was godfather, and Aunt Lison godmother. The child received the names of Pierre Simon Paul; Paul was to be his ordinary name.

Early in September, Aunt Lison went away again, without any fuss, and her absence was as unperceived as her presence.

One evening, after dinner, the curé appeared. He seemed embarrassed, as if he had brought a mystery with him, and after some commonplaces, he begged the Baroness and her husband to grant him a few moments' talk in private.

The three of them walked away slowly to the end of the big avenue, conversing eagerly, whilst Julien, who remained behind with Jeanne, was surprised, uneasy, irritated at this secrecy.

He proposed to accompany the priest when he took leave, and they went off together in the direction of the church, where the angelus was being rung.

It was fresh, almost cold; the Baron with his wife and daughter soon went back into the drawing-room. They were all dozing a bit, when Julien suddenly returned, red in the face, with an angry expression.

Not dreaming that Jeanne was in the room, he shouted out to his parents-in-law from the door: "Good heavens! you're mad! to go and chuck away 20,000 francs on that girl!"

They were taken by surprise; there was no

answer. He went on, bellowing with rage: "How it's possible to be so stupid! I suppose you don't want to leave us a sou!"

Then the Baron, who was recovering his self-possession, tried to stop him: "Be quiet! remember you're speaking before your wife."

But he stamped his foot with exasperation: "What do I care? Besides, she knows about it. It's robbing her."

Jeanne, amazed, looked on without understanding. She nervously inquired: "What is the matter now?"

Then Julien turned to her, took her as a witness on his side, as if she were a partner who had also been disappointed of an expected benefit. He told her briefly the scheme for marrying Rosalie, the gift of the Barville estate, which was worth at least 20,000 francs. He repeated: "But your parents are mad, my dear, raving mad!—20,000 francs!—20,000 francs! But they've lost their heads!—20,000 francs for a bastard!"

Jeanne listened, without emotion, and without anger, astonished herself at her calmness, indifferent now to everything that did not concern her child.

The Baron was suffocating, but found no answer. At last he burst out, with a stamp of the foot, exclaiming: "Take care what you're saying; it's positively disgusting. Whose fault is it that we have to give a dowry to this girl? Whose child is it? You would have liked to abandon it now!"

Julien, amazed at the Baron's violence, stared at him. He went on more quietly: "But 1500

francs would have been ample. They all have children before marrying, so that whether they belong to this man or that, makes no difference. Instead of which, by giving one of your farms worth 20,000 francs, besides the injustice to us, you're telling every one what has happened You ought at least to have thought of our name and position"

And he spoke in a severe voice, like a man strong in his rights and in the logic of his reasoning The Baron, disconcerted by this unexpected argument, remained gaping with his mouth open. Whereupon Julien, appreciating his advantage, stated his conclusions "Luckily, nothing is yet done, I know the fellow who is going to marry her, he is an honest man, and everything can be arranged I'll see to it"

And he went out forthwith, doubtless afraid to continue the discussion, happy at the general silence, which he took for acquiescence

When he had gone, the Baron, beside himself with amazement and quivering with wrath, cried: "Oh! this is too much, too much!"

But Jeanne, beholding her father's horrified face, began at once to laugh, with her old, bright laugh, as when she had been present at some funny incident

She repeated: "Father, father, did you hear how he uttered the words '20,000 francs'?"

And her mother, to whom laughter was as natural as tears,—happy, too, at Jeanne's merry mood—quaked with gasping laughter, that filled her eyes with tears, as she recalled her son-in-law's furious face, and his indignant exclamation, and

his vehement refusal to allow the girl he had seduced to be presented with money that did not belong to him. Then the Baron caught the contagion, and started off in his turn; and the trio laughed enough to make themselves ill, just as in the good old days.

When they had become a little quieter, Jeanne expressed her astonishment: "It's curious, it doesn't affect me at all. I look upon him now as a stranger. I can't believe I'm his wife. You see, I am amused by his— by his—by his indelicacies."

And, without exactly knowing why, they kissed one another, still smiling and loving-tender.

But two days later, after lunch, when Julien had just gone riding, a tall youth of twenty-two to twenty-five, clad in a new blue blouse with stiff folds, his cuffs swelled out and buttoned to the wrist, stealthily came in through the fence, as if he had been ambushed there since the morning, glided along the Couillards ditch, rounded the château, and suspiciously approached the Baron and the two women, who were sitting, as usual, under the plane.

He had removed his cap on perceiving them, and came forward bowing, with embarrassed manners.

As soon as he was near enough to make himself heard, he mumbled. "Your servant, M. le Baron, Madame, and company." Then, as no one addressed him, he announced: "My name is Désiré Lecoq."

The name not revealing anything, the Baron inquired: "What do you want?"

Whereupon the youth was altogether disconcerted at having to explain his business. He hesitated, lowering and raising his eyes alternately from the cap he held in his hands to the top of the roof of the château: "M'sieu l'Curé told me a bit about the thing——" then he was silent from fear of letting out too much and compromising his interests.

The Baron, not understanding, rejoined: "What thing? I've no idea."

The other one then made up his mind, and said in a low voice: "It's about your servant—Rosalie."

Jeanne, who had guessed it, rose and went away with her child in her arms. And the Baron said: "Come here!" pointing to the seat his daughter had just left.

The peasant immediately sat down, murmuring: "You're very kind." Then he waited, as if he had no more to say. After rather a long silence, he at last made up his mind, and, raising his eyes to the blue sky: "Here's fine weather for the season. The earth will benefit by it, when the crops are sown." And he grew silent again.

The Baron was getting impatient. He put the question straight, in a dry tone: "So it's you who're going to marry Rosalie."

The man at once grew restless, disturbed in his habits of Norman caution. He answered distrustfully in a more wide-awake style: "It's according; perhaps, perhaps not; it's according."

The Baron, however, was provoked at these evasions: "Confound it! give a frank answer; have

you come for that purpose, yes or no? Are you going to take her, yes or no?"

The fellow in his perplexity kept looking at his feet: "If it's as M'sieu l'Curé says, I'll have her; but if it's as M'sieu Julien says, I won't."

"What did M. Julien say?"

"M'sieu Julien told me I should have 1500 francs; I'd have her for 20,000, but not for 1500."

Whereupon the Baroness, who was buried in her arm-chair, began laughing in little shakes at the peasant's anxious attitude.

The peasant squinted at her with a dissatisfied eye, not comprehending such merriment; and he waited.

The Baron, who was bored by this huckstering, cut it short: "I told M. le Curé that you should have the Barville farm, during your lifetime, which would afterwards revert to the child. It is worth 20,000 francs. I don't alter my word. Is it a bargain, yes or no?"

The fellow smiled with a humble and satisfied air, and, becoming suddenly talkative: "Oh! well, I don't say no. That was the only thing that checked me. When M'sieu l'Curé told me about it, I was ready at once, by G—d; and, besides, I was glad to please M'sieu l'Baron, who'd repay me for it, I said to myself. Isn't it true, when you oblige anybody, you always get it back later? But M'sieu Julien came to see me, and then it was only 1500. I said to myself: 'Must find out,' and I came. Of course, I believed your word, but I wanted to know. Good accounts make good friends; isn't it true, M'sieu le Baron?"—

He had to be stopped; the Baron asked: "When will you conclude the marriage?"

The man then all at once became again shy, full of embarrassment. At last he said, hesitatingly: "Won't you give me first of all a little note?"

This time the Baron was enraged: "But, great heavens! you'll have the marriage-contract! That's the best of documents going."

The peasant persisted: "Meanwhile, we might have a bit in writing, all the same; it never does any harm."

The Baron rose to end the matter: "Answer 'yes' or 'no' at once. If you don't want her, say so; I have another candidate."

The fear of competition then upset the wily Norman. He made up his mind, and stretched out his hand just as if he had bought a cow: "Done! M'sieur le Baron, it's a bargain. If I break it, I'm a rascal."

The Baron agreed, and then cried: "Ludivine!" The cook showed her head at the window. "Bring a bottle of wine." They drank to the conclusion of the bargain.—And the youth went off with a lighter step.

Nothing was said to Julien about the visit. The contract was prepared with great secrecy; then, when once the banns were published, the marriage was celebrated on a Monday morning.

A neighbour carried the brat to church, behind the new sponsor, as a sure guarantee of good luck. And nobody in the district was astonished; they only envied Désiré Lecoq. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, they said with a sly smile, in which there was no hint of indignation.

Julien made a dreadful scene about it, which shortened his parents-in-law's stay at Les Peuples. Jeanne saw them off again without excessive grief, Paul having become for her an inexhaustible source of happiness.

CHAPTER IX

Jeanne having completely recovered from her confinement, they resolved to pay their visit to the Fourvilles, and also to make the acquaintance of the Marquis de Coutelier.

Julien had just bought a new carriage in a public sale, a phaeton that required only one horse, so that they could go out twice a month.

They used it on a bright December day, and, after driving two hours over Norman commons, they began to descend into a small valley with wooded sides, the bottom of which was cultivated.

Presently the ploughed lands were quickly followed by meadows, and the meadows by a marsh full of big reeds that were dry at that time of the year, whose long leaves waved like yellow ribbons.

All at once, after a sharp bend in the valley, appeared the château of La Vrillette, turning one of its sides to the wooded slope, whilst the other steeped its walls in a large lake which was terminated, in front, by a wood of tall firs climbing the other slope of the valley.

They had to pass over an old drawbridge, and drive under a huge Louis XIII. archway, in order to reach the court of honour, where stood a fine manor-house of the same epoch, with brick window-framings, flanked by slated turrets.

Julien explained to Jeanne all the points of the building, like a *habitué* who knew it down to the ground. He did the honours, and grew rapturous about its beauties: "Look at that archway! Isn't it a handsome building, eh? The whole of the other façade is in the lake, with a regal flight of steps which goes right down to the water; and four boats are moored at the bottom of the steps, two for the Comte, and two for the Comtesse. There on the right, where you see the screen of poplars, is the end of the lake, that's where the river starts which goes to Fécamp. The country is full of wild fowl. The Comte is mad on shooting. There's a real lordly house for you!"

The hall-door had opened, and the pale Comtesse appeared, coming, with a smile, to meet her visitors, clad in a trailing dress like an old-world châtelaine. She looked indeed like a beautiful Lady of the Lake, born for the noble manor-house.

The drawing-room, with eight windows, had four that opened on the water and on the dark pine-wood that climbed the slope just facing them.

The dark-toned verdure gave the pool a look of depth, austerity, and mournfulness, and, when the wind blew, the groanings of the trees appeared to be the voice of the marsh.

The Comtesse took Jeanne's hands as if she had been her friend from childhood, then made her sit down, and seated herself near her, on a low chair, whilst Julien, in whom all the forgotten elegancies had been renewed during the last five months, talked and smiled, easily and amiably.

The Comtesse and he spoke of their rides. She laughed a little at his method of mounting, calling

him "The tottering knight," and he laughed too, christening her "The Amazon queen."

A gun-shot under the windows startled Jeanne into a little cry. It was the Comte killing a teal.

His wife immediately called to him. They heard a noise of oars, the grating of a boat against the stone, and he appeared, huge and booted, followed by two soaking-wet dogs, red like himself, which lay down on the carpet before the door.

He seemed more at ease in his own abode, and was delighted to see the visitors. He had fresh wood thrown on the fire, and Madeira and biscuits brought in; and suddenly he exclaimed: "Of course, you are going to dine with us?" Jeanne, who was always thinking of her child, refused; he insisted, and, as she persevered in her refusal, Julien made an impatient gesture. Then she feared to re-awaken his bad, quarrelsome temper; and, although she was in torture at the idea of not seeing Paul before the next day, she accepted.

The afternoon was charming. First of all, they went to see the springs. They gushed out at the foot of a mossy rock into a clear basin, which was continually stirring like boiling water; then they made a boating excursion along regular paths cut in a forest of dry reeds. The Comte rowed, sitting between his two dogs, which sniffed, with their noses in the air; and every stroke of his oars lifted the big boat and launched it on. Jeanne sometimes let her hand dangle in the cool water, and she enjoyed the icy freshness that ran from her fingers to her heart. Right in the stern of the boat, Julien and the Comtesse, who was wrapt in shawls,

smiled with the continuous smile of happy people who are too happy to talk.

Evening came with long, icy shivers, northerly breezes that passed through the withered reeds. The sun had sunk behind the firs, and the red sky, flecked with small, scarlet, fantastic clouds, made you cold merely by looking at them.

They re-entered the vast drawing-room, in which blazed a gigantic fire. A sensation of warmth and pleasure inspired feelings of delight as soon as they reached the door. Then the Comte, in a merry mood, took up his wife in his athletic arms, and, raising her like a child to his mouth, gave her two hearty kisses on her cheeks like an honest man at the height of content.

And Jeanne gazed smilingly at the kindly giant, whom you would think an ogre at the mere sight of his moustache; and she thought: "What mistakes one makes every day about everything!" Then, almost involuntarily, she turned her eyes to Julien, and saw him standing in the doorway, horribly pale, with his eyes fixed on the Comte. She anxiously approached her husband, and in a low voice: "Are you ill? What's the matter with you?" He replied churlishly: "Nothing! Leave me alone. I was cold."

When they passed into the dining-room, the Comte asked leave to have his dogs in; and they forthwith came, and sat on the right and left of their master. Every moment he gave them some tit-bit, and fondled their long silky ears. The animals stretched out their heads, wagged their tails, quivered with delight.

After dinner, when Jeanne and Julien were get-

ting ready to go. M. de Fourville detained them again to show them some torch-light fishing.

He posted them, including the Comtesse, on the flight of steps going down to the lake, and he got in his boat with a valet, who carried a casting-net and a lighted torch. The night was clear and attractive beneath a sky studded with gold.

The torch cast strange, moving trails of fire over the water, threw dancing gleams on the reeds, illuminated the great screen of firs. And suddenly, as the boat turned, a colossal, fantastic shadow, the shadow of a man, rose up on this illuminated border of the wood. The head passed beyond the trees, was lost in the sky, and the feet plunged in the pool. The immense creature then raised its arms as if to seize hold of the stars. The huge arms rose suddenly, then dropped, and at once a faint noise was heard of water being struck.

Next, the boat having again tacked slightly, the prodigious phantom seemed to run along the wood, which was lit up, as the torch turned with the boat; then it was lost in the invisible horizon, then all at once it re-appeared, not so large, but more distinct, with peculiar movements, on the façade of the château.

And the Comte's loud voice was heard: "Gilberte, I've caught eight!"

The oars struck the water. The enormous shadow now remained standing, motionless on the wall, but gradually diminishing in size and breadth; its head appeared to descend, its body to grow thin; and when M. de Fourville remounted the steps, still followed by the valet carrying the light,

it was reduced to the proportion of his body, and repeated all his gestures

He had in a net eight big, quivering fish.

When Jeanne and Julien were on the way home, well wrapt up in cloaks and rugs, which had been lent them, Jeanne remarked, almost unconsciously: "What a fine chap that giant is!" And Julien, who was driving, replied. "Yes, but he doesn't always restrain himself enough when people are there"

A week later they went to the Coutelliers', who were accounted the first noble family in the province Their domain of Remuel touched the big township of Cany The new chateau, built under Louis XIV, was buried in a magnificent, walled park From a height, you might see the ruins of the old chateau Liveried valets showed the visitors into a huge, imposing room Right in the centre, a kind of column supported an immense Sèvres cup, and, in the pedestal, an autograph letter of the king, which was protected by a crystal plate, invited the Marquis Léopold Hervé Joseph Germer de Varneville, de Rollebosc de Coutelier, to receive this gift from the sovereign.

Jeanne and Julien were examining this royal present when the Marquis and Marquise entered. The lady was powdered, amiable as a matter of duty, and affected, owing to her desire to appear condescending The husband, a big man with white hair brushed straight up on his head, put a degree of *hauteur* into his gestures, his voice, his whole attitude, which bespoke his importance.

They belonged to those people of etiquette

whose minds, feelings and words seem always to walk on stilts.

They made conversation by themselves, without waiting for answers, smiling with an indifferent air, and seemed always to be fulfilling the duty, imposed by their birth, of politely receiving the inferior nobles of the neighbourhood.

Jeanne and Julien, ill at ease, tried to be agreeable; they were embarrassed at stopping any longer, but lacked skill in retiring from the scene; however, the Marquise herself ended the visit naturally and simply, by stopping short the conversation, like a polite queen dismissing people.

On their way back Julien observed: "If you like, we'll put a limit to our visiting; for me the Fourvilles are enough." And Jeanne agreed.

December passed slowly, that dark month, that gloomy gap at the year's end. Life indoors began again as in the previous year. But Jeanne was not bored, being ever preoccupied with Paul, whom Julien looked at askance, with restless, discontented eyes.

Often, when the mother held him in her arms, fondled him with those frenzies of tenderness which women have for their children, she would hold him up to the father, urging: "Come, kiss him! One might imagine you don't love him." With a disgusted air, he would touch with the tips of his lips the baby's smooth forehead, describing a circle with his body, as if to avoid the little, moving, clenched hands. Whereupon he would quickly go out; you might have said he was driven out by repugnance.

The mayor, the doctor, and the curé came to dinner now and then; now and then the Fourvilles, with whom they became more and more intimate.

The Comte appeared to worship Paul. He held him on his knees during the whole of the visits, and even during whole afternoons. He handled him delicately with his big, powerful hands, tickled the tip of his nose with the points of his long moustaches, and then kissed him with passionate impulsiveness, like a mother. He was always grieving that his marriage remained barren.

March was bright, dry, and almost mild. The Comtesse Gilberte spoke again of riding trips together, all four of them. Jeanne, a trifle weary of the long evenings, the long nights, the long, monotonous days, one like the other, agreed, quite happy at the proposal, and she amused herself for a week by preparing her riding-dress.

Then they began the excursions. They always went two and two, the Comtesse and Julien in front, the Comte and Jeanne a hundred paces behind. The latter chatted quietly, like friends, for they had become friends by the contact of their upright souls, their simple hearts; the other pair often spoke in whispers, burst out sometimes into loud fits of laughter, looked at each other suddenly, as if their eyes had things to say which their mouths did not utter; and they went off all at once at a gallop, urged on by a desire to flee, to go further, very far.

Next, Gilberte appeared to grow irritable. Her shrill voice, carried on gusts of wind, occasionally reached the ears of the other two who lagged behind. Whereupon the Comte smiled, remarking to

Jeanne: "My wife doesn't get up in a good humour every day."

One evening, on coming back, when the Comtesse was provoking her horse, spurring it on, and then holding it up by sudden jerks, they heard Julien warn her several times: "Take care! please take care! it'll run away with you." She answered: "So much the worse, it's nothing to do with you," in so clear and hard a tone that the distinct words rang over the fields as if they were hanging in the air.

The animal reared, kicked, foamed at the mouth. Suddenly the Comte anxiously shouted with his strong lungs "Do take care, Gilberte!" Whereupon, as if in defiance, in one of the exasperated moods of a woman whom nothing can stop, she brutally struck her horse between its ears with her whip; it reared madly, beat the air with its forelegs, and, dropping, dashed forward with a terrific leap, and set off over the heath at its wildest speed.

It first crossed a meadow, then, rushing across some ploughed fields, it kicked up the wet, heavy earth into dust, and went so quickly that the horse could hardly be distinguished from its rider.

Julien, stupefied, remained where he was, shouting desperately: "Madame, madame!"

The Comte, however, uttered a kind of groan, and, bending over the neck of his powerful horse, urged it forward with a push of his whole body; and he urged it on in such a way, exciting it, encouraging it, maddening it with his voice, gestures and spurs, that the gigantic horseman seemed to be carrying the heavy beast between his thighs, and to lift it up as if to make it fly. They rushed

on at an indescribable speed, keeping straight ahead; and Jeanne saw in the distance the outlines of wife and husband, fleeing, fleeing, diminishing, becoming blurred, disappearing, as you may see two birds, pursuing one another, becoming lost and vanishing on the horizon.

Julien then approached Jeanne, still at walking pace, muttering furiously: "I think she's mad to-day."

And the couple went after their friends, who were now lost in an undulation of the common.

After a quarter of an hour, they caught sight of them returning, and they soon came up to them.

The Comte, red, sweating, smiling, contented, triumphant, was holding his wife's quivering steed with his wrist of steel. She was pale, with a painful, drawn expression; and she supported herself with one hand on her husband's shoulder, as if she was going to faint.

Jeanne understood that day how madly in love the Comte was.

During the following month the Comtesse appeared more joyous than she had ever been before. She came oftener to Les Peuples, laughed continually, kissed Jeanne with transports of affection. One would have fancied that a mysterious ecstasy had come to pervade her life. Her husband, happy himself, never kept his eyes off her, and tried a every moment to touch her hand, her dress, in a redoubling of his passion.

He observed to Jeanne one evening: "We are in the full flood of happiness at this moment. Gilberte has never been so nice before. She is no

longer bad-tempered, and doesn't get angry. I feel she loves me. Up till now I wasn't sure."

Julien also seemed altered; gayer, more patient, as if the friendship of the two families had brought peace and joy to both of them.

The spring was curiously early and warm.

From the mild mornings to the calm, lukewarm evenings, the sun fertilized the whole surface of the soil. There was a sudden and potent outburst of all the seeds at the same time, one of those irresistible risings of the sap, one of those ardours of re-birth, which nature sometimes displays in privileged years, which might cause one to believe in a rejuvenation of the world.

Jeanne felt vaguely disturbed by this fermentation of life. She felt sudden languors when she saw a little flower in the grass; she had delightful moods of melancholy, hours of dreamy idleness.

Presently there came into her mind affectionate memories of the first periods of her love; not that she felt at heart a renewal of affection for Julien, that was over—over for ever; but all her flesh, caressed by the breezes, penetrated by the perfumes of spring, was excited, as if solicited by some invisible and tender appeal.

She liked being alone, letting herself go beneath the warmth of the sun, experiencing vague, calm sensations and delights that awakened no ideas.

One morning, as she was thus dozing, a vision flashed across her, a quick vision of that sunny gap among the dark leaves in the little wood near Étretat. It was there that, for the first time, she had felt her body quiver near the young man who then loved her; it was there that he had stammered

out for the first time his heart's timid desire; it was there, too, that she thought she had all at once reached the radiant future of her hopes.

And she wanted to see the wood again, to make a kind of sentimental, superstitious pilgrimage to it, as if going again to the spot could alter anything in the course of her life.

Julien had gone off at dawn, she did not know where. So she had the Martins' little white horse saddled, which she now rode sometimes, and she started.

It was one of those days which are so calm that nothing stirred anywhere, not a blade of grass, not a leaf; everything seems motionless, as if it would be so till the end of time, as if the wind were dead. You would fancy the very insects had vanished.

A burning, sovereign peace was falling imperceptibly from the sun, in a golden mist; and Jeanne walked her horse along, rocked in reverie, happy. Now and then she raised her eyes to look at a quite small, white cloud, as big as a pinch of cotton, a fleck of vapour hanging forgotten up above, all by itself in the middle of the blue sky.

She went down into the valley which runs down to the sea between those big arches of the cliff which are called the gates of Etretat, and slowly she gained the wood. The light poured down through the foliage, which was still thin. Sh looked for the spot, without finding it, rambling about the little paths.

Suddenly, as she was passing through a long avenue, she perceived, right at the end, two saddle-horses fastened to a tree, and she immediately

recognized them; they belonged to Gilberte and Julien. The loneliness was beginning to weigh upon her, and she was glad at this unforeseen meeting. She put her horse at the trot.

When she reached the two animals, which were patient, as if accustomed to these long halts, she called. There was no answer.

A woman's glove and two whips were lying on the rumpled grass. So they had been sitting there, and then went away, leaving the horses behind.

She waited a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, in surprise, not understanding what they could be doing. When she had dismounted, she did not stir, but leaned against a tree-trunk, and two small birds, not seeing her, flew down into the grass quite close to her. One of them was excited, hopped round the other, its wings outstretched and fluttering, nodding its head and chirping; and all at once they coupled.

Jeanne was as astonished as if she was ignorant of such things; then she said to herself: "Of course; it's spring time;" another thought then came into her head, a suspicion. She looked again at the glove, the whips, the deserted horses; and she mounted wildly into the saddle with an irresistible desire to flee.

She was going back now to Les Peuples at a gallop. Her brain was working, reasoning, combining facts, connecting incidents. How was it she had not guessed it earlier? how was it she had seen nothing? How was it she had not understood Julien's absences, the renewal of his former elegance, and then his good humour? She recalled too, Gilberte's nervous irritableness, her exagger-

ated caresses, and that species of beatitude in which she had been living for some time, and at which the Comte was happy.

She set her horse at walking-pace, because she had to reflect seriously, and the quick motion disturbed her ideas.

After the first emotion had gone by, her heart had again become almost calm, without jealousy and without hate, but it swelled with contempt. She hardly thought of Julien: nothing about him surprised her now; but the double treachery of the Comtesse, her friend, revolted her. Every one, then, was treacherous, lying, and false. And tears came to her eyes. One weeps sometimes for illusions with as much sorrow as for the dead.

Still, she resolved to pretend to know nothing, to close her soul to unstable affections, to love only Paul and her parents, and to endure the others with a calm face.

As soon as she was back, she clasped her son to her, carried him into her room, and kissed him madly for an hour, without stopping.

Julien returned to dinner, charming and smiling, full of amiable intentions. He asked: "Are not your father and mother coming this year?"

She was so grateful to him for this kindness that she almost forgave him the discovery in the wood; and, a violent longing suddenly seizing her to see again as soon as possible the two beings she loved best after Paul, she spent the whole evening writing to them, to hasten their arrival.

They promised to come on May 20th. It was then the 7th.

She awaited them with growing impatience, as

if, in addition even to her affection for her son, she experienced a fresh need of rubbing her heart against honest hearts, of talking, with open soul, to people of pure lives, free from all scoundrelism, whose whole life and thoughts and actions and desires had ever been upright.

What she felt now was a kind of isolation of her upright conscience in the midst of all those weakened consciences; and although she had speedily learnt to dissemble, although she welcomed the Comtesse with extended hand and smiling lip, she felt the sensation of emptiness, of contempt for human beings, growing, enveloping her; and the tittle-tattle of the village filled her soul every day with a greater disgust, a deeper scorn for her fellow-men.

The daughter of the Couillards had just had a child, and the marriage was about to take place. The servant of the Martins, an orphan, was in the family way; so was a neighbouring girl of fifteen; so was a widow, a poor, halting, dirty woman, who was nicknamed La Crotte ("the Dungheap"), so horrible was her filthiness.

At every moment she heard of some new pregnancy, or some escapade of a young girl, or a married peasant-woman with a family, or some wealthy, respected farmer.

That hot spring seemed to be stirring up the sap of men as of plants.

And Jeanne, whose dead senses were no longer excited, whose wounded heart and sentimental soul alone seemed moved by the warm, fertilizing breezes, who indulged in dreams, enraptured without desires, passionately fond of reverie, and dead

to carnal needs, was amazed, full of a repugnance that verged on hatred for such dirty bestiality.

The coupling of human beings now roused her indignation, as if it were against nature; if she was angry with Gilberte, it was not because she had taken her husband, but because of the actual fact that she, too, had fallen into the common filth.

She did not, after all, belong to the race of peasants with whom the lower instincts dominate. How had she been able to abandon herself in the same way as those brutes?

The very day her parents were expected, Julien revived her disgust by gaily telling her, as if it were quite natural and comic, that the baker, having heard a noise in the oven, the day before, which was not baking day, thought it was a stray cat, and, instead, discovered his wife there, "who was not baking bread."

And he added: "The baker shut the opening of the oven; those inside were nearly suffocated; it was the baker's little boy who informed the neighbours, for he had seen his mother go in with the blacksmith."

And Julien laughed, repeating: "These practical jokers give us some lovely bread to eat, don't they? Why, it's as good as a story of La Fontaine."

Jeanne did not care to touch bread now.

When the post-chaise drew up before the front and the Baron's jovial face appeared at the window, a profound emotion, a tumultuous impulse of affection stirred the young wife's soul and breast, such as she had never felt before.

But she was overcome and felt almost faint,

when she caught sight of her mother. The Baroness had aged ten years in those six winter-months. Her enormous, flabby, falling cheeks were purple, as if swollen with blood; her eyes seemed dead; and she could no longer move unless supported under the arms; her difficult breathing had become hissing, and so hard to draw, that those near her had a feeling of painful distress.

The Baron, who saw her every day, had not noticed her decline; and when she complained of her chronic suffocation, of her increasing depression, he would reply: "No, my dear, I've always seen you like that."

Jeanne, after escorting them to their room, withdrew into her own to cry; she was overcome, dazed with grief. Afterwards, she went in search of her father, and, throwing herself into his arms, her eyes still wet with tears: "Oh! how changed mamma is! What's the matter with her?—tell me, what's the matter with her?" He was much surprised, and rejoined: "Do you think so? What an idea! No, no. I am always with her, and I assure you I don't find her ill. She is as usual."

That evening Julien remarked to his wife: "Your mother's really ill. I believe she's on her last legs." And, when Jeanne burst out sobbing, he grew impatient. "Come now. I don't say she's absolutely done for. You're always given to wild exaggeration. She's altered, that's all; it's her age."

After a week she thought no more about it. She was accustomed to her mother's changed looks, and perhaps thrust her fears aside, even as one always thrusts aside, as one rejects, with a sort of

selfish instinct, of natural need of a quiet mind, all threatening apprehension and cares.

The Baroness, feeble in her walk, only went out for half-an-hour every day. When she had made only one tour of "her" alley, she was unable to move any more, and wanted to sit down on "her" bench. And, when she felt incapable even of finishing her promenade, she would say: "Let's stop; my hypertrophy is spoiling my legs to-day."

She hardly ever laughed, smiled only at things that would have sent her into fits of laughter the previous year. But, as her eyes had remained first-rate, she spent days in re-reading "Corinne," or Lamartine's "Méditations;" then she asked for the "souvenir drawer" to be brought her. Whereupon, having emptied on her knees the old letters which were sweet to her heart, she would place the drawer on a chair beside her, and put back her "relics" one by one, after slowly reading each of them. And, when she was alone,—quite alone, she kissed some of them, as one kisses in secret the hair of dead people one has loved.

Sometimes Jeanne, entering suddenly, found her weeping; weeping sad tears. She exclaimed: "What's the matter, manma?" And the Baroness would answer, after a long sigh: 'It's the effect of my relics. I've been stirring up things that were so happy, and they're all over! And, besides, there are persons of whom one has hardly bee thinking, and whom one suddenly finds again. You think you see them, and hear them, and that has an awful effect on you. You'll know it, later on."

When the Baron broke in upon such moments

of sorrow, he would mutter: "Jeanne, my darling, believe me, burn your letters, all your letters, your mother's, mine, all. There's nothing more terrible, when you're old, than shoving your nose back into youth." Jeanne, however, also kept her correspondence, prepared her "relic box," obeying a kind of hereditary instinct of dreamy sentimentality, although she differed in every way from her mother.

The Baron, a few days later, had to absent himself on business, and went away.

The season was splendid. Mild nights, swarming with stars, followed calm evenings, serene evenings radiant days, and radiant days dazzling dawns. The Baroness soon felt in better health; and Jeanne, forgetting Julien's amours and Gilberte's perfidy, felt almost entirely happy. The whole country was in flower, and full of perfume; and the open sea, which remained calm, glittered from morning till evening, beneath the sun.

One afternoon Jeanne took Paul in her arms, and went off in the fields. She looked, now at her son, now at the grass mottled with flowers along the road, feeling loving and endlessly glad. Every moment she kissed the child, clasped him passionately to her; presently, inhaling some exquisite country smell, she felt herself swooning, immersed in an infinite well-being. Then she dreamt of his future. What would he be? Now she wished him to be a great, famous, powerful man. Now she preferred him to be in a modest condition, and to remain near her, devoted, affectionate, his arms always open to his mother. When she loved him with her selfish mother's heart, she desired him to

remain her son, nothing but her son; but, when she loved him with her passionate reason, she was ambitious for him to become somebody in the world.

She sat down at the edge of a ditch, and began looking at him. It seemed to her she had never seen him before. And she was startled at the thought that the child would become big, that he would walk with a firm step, that he would have hair on his cheeks, and speak with a resonant voice.

Some one was calling her afar off. She raised her head. It was Marius running. She thought a visitor was waiting for her, and she got up, discontented at being disturbed. But the boy was running at full speed, and, when he was near enough, shouted: "Madame, the Baroness is very ill."

She felt as if a drop of cold water was running down her back, and she walked back as quickly as she could, her head swimming.

She saw from a distance a number of people under the plane. She rushed on, and, the group opening for her, she saw her mother lying on the ground, her head resting on two pillows. Her face was quite black, her eyes were shut, and her chest, which had panted for twenty years, did not stir. The nurse caught hold of the child in the young woman's arms, and carried it off.

Jeanne, looking haggard, inquired: "What's happened? How did she fall? Somebody go for the doctor!" And, as she turned, she perceived the Curé, who had been somehow informed. He offered his services, turned up the sleeves of his soutane for immediate work. But the vinegar, the

eau de Cologne, the rubbing was ineffectual. "She must be undressed and put to bed," said the priest.

Farmer Joseph Couillard was there, as well as old Simon and Ludivine. Helped by the Abbé Picot, they tried to carry the Baroness; but, when they lifted her up, her head fell back, and the dress they had caught hold of was torn, so heavy and difficult to move was her stout body. Jeanne then began screaming with fright. The huge, soft body was laid again on the ground.

They had to take an arm-chair from the drawing-room; and, when they had seated the Baroness in it, they were at length able to carry her away. Step by step they climbed the perron, then the staircase, and when they reached her room, they deposited her on the bed.

As the cook was bungling about removing her garments, Widow Dentu, who came suddenly, like the priest, found herself just in the nick of time, as if they had "smelt death," as the servants put it.

Joseph Couillard went off at top speed for the doctor; and, when the priest was about to go for the holy oils, the nurse whispered in his ear: "Don't disturb yourself, Monsieur le Curé, I know all about it; she's gone!"

Jeanne was wildly entreating people, not knowing what to do, what to try, what remedy to use. The Curé, taking his chance, pronounced absolution.

For two hours they waited by that purple, lifeless body. Jeanne, now on her knees, was sobbing, eaten up with anguish and grief.

When the door opened and the doctor appeared, it seemed to her as if she saw the entry of salvation, comfort, hope; and she darted towards him, gasping out all she knew of the accident: "She was walking like every day—she was walking all right—in fact, very well indeed. She had had soup and two eggs for lunch—she suddenly fell down—she became black as you see her now—and she hasn't moved since—we have tried everything to revive her—everything——" She stopped short, horrified by a furtive gesture of the nurse to the doctor, signifying all was over, quite over. Then, refusing to understand, she asked anxiously, repeatedly: "Is it serious? D'you think it's serious?"

At last he remarked: "I'm afraid it's—it's—all over. Be brave, as brave as you can!"

And Jeanne, opening her arms, threw herself on her mother.

Julien came in. He was amazed, visibly annoyed; he did not utter any cry of pain or apparent despair; he had been taken unawares too suddenly for him to assume immediately the proper look and expression. He murmured: "I expected it; I felt the end was near." Then he pulled out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, knelt, crossed himself, mumbled something, and, rising up, tried also to raise his wife. She, however, had her arms round the corpse, and kissed it, nearly lying on it. It was necessary to pull her away. She seemed crazy.

After an hour she was allowed to return. There was no longer any hope. The room was now arranged as a mortuary chamber. Julien and the

priest were speaking in low voices near a window. Widow Dentu, sitting comfortably in an arm-chair, like a woman used to vigils, who feels herself at home in a house as soon as death has entered, appeared to be already slumbering.

Night fell. The Curé went up to Jeanne, took her hands, encouraged her, pouring on her inconsolable heart the oily water of church consolations. He spoke of the deceased, eulogized her in priestly terms, and, sad with the sham sadness of a priest for whom corpses are beneficent, he offered to spend the night in prayer by the body.

But Jeanne refused, in an outburst of convulsive tears. She wanted to be alone, quite alone, on that farewell night. Julien came forward: "But it's impossible; we shall both stop here." She signified "no" with her head; she was unable to speak any more. At last she managed to say: "It's my mother, my mother. I want to be alone to watch over her." The doctor murmured: "Let her do as she pleases; the nurse can remain in the room with her."

The priest and Julien agreed, thinking of bed. Then the Abbé Picot knelt in his turn, prayed, got up, and went away, saying: "She was a saint," in the tone in which he used to say, "Dominus vobiscum."

Next the Vicomte asked in his ordinary voice: "Will you take something?" Jeanne did not answer, not knowing she had been addressed. He went on: "You would perhaps do well to eat something to keep you going." She rejoined, with a bewildered air: "Send at once for papa." And he went out to send a horseman to Rouen.

She was plunged in a sort of motionless grief, as if she had expected the hour of the last *tête-à-tête* in order to abandon herself to the rising flood of despairing regrets.

Shadows had invaded the room, veiling the dead in darkness. Widow Dentu began roaming about with her light step, looking for and arranging invisible objects with the silent movements of a nurse. Then she lit two candles, which she softly placed on the night-table covered with a white cloth, at the head of the bed.

Jeanne seemed to see nothing, feel nothing, understand nothing. She was waiting to be alone.

Julien came back; he had dined; and again he inquired: "Don't you want to take anything?" His wife nodded a negative.

He sat down, with an air of resignation rather than of sorrow, and did not speak a word.

All three remained motionless on their seats, apart from one another.

At intervals the nurse snored a bit in her sleep, then suddenly woke up.

Julien at last got up, and approaching Jeanne: "D'you want to be alone now?" She took his hand with involuntary impulsiveness: "Oh yes! leave me!"

He kissed her on the forehead, whispering: "I'll come and see from time to time." And he went out with Widow Dentu, who rolled her arm-chair into the neighbouring room.

Jeanne shut the door, then she opened the two windows quite wide. She received right in her face the warm caress of a haymaking evening. The

grass on the lawn, mown the day before, lay in the moonlight.

The soft feeling hurt her, pierced her like an irony.

She returned to the bed, took one of the lifeless, cold hands in hers, and began contemplating her mother.

She was no longer swollen as at the moment she had the fit; she seemed to be sleeping at present more quietly than she had ever done; and the pale flame of the candles, flickering in the wind, was continually displacing the shadows on her face, making her appear alive, as if she had stirred.

Jeanne eagerly gazed at her, and from the remotest distances of her early childhood came a crowd of memories.

She recalled her mother's visits to the convent parlour, the way she handed her the paper-bag full of sweets, a multitude of little details, little acts, little tendernesses, words, tones, familiar gestures, the fold of her eyes when she laughed, her deep, panting sigh when she had just sat down.

And she remained there, watching, repeating to herself in a dull sort of way: "She is dead;" and all the horror of the phrase was apparent to her.

That person lying there—mamma—little mother—Madame Adélaïde—was dead! She would never move again, nor speak, nor laugh, nor dine opposite papa; she would never say again: "Good morning, Jeannette." She was dead!

They were going to nail her up in a box and bury her, and there would be an end of her. She would never be seen again. Was it possible? What!

wouldn't she have her mother again? That dear, familiar face, which she saw as soon as she opened her eyes, which she loved as soon as she opened her arms, that great outlet of affection, that unique being, her mother, more important for the heart than all the rest of mankind, had disappeared. She had only a few hours in which to behold her face, that motionless, expressionless face; and then, nothing, nothing more for ever, a memory.

And she cast herself on her knees in a horrible fit of despair; and with her hands clenched on the linen which she twisted about, her mouth pressed to the bed, she cried in a heart-rending voice, stifled amid the sheets and coverings: "Oh, mamma! my poor mamma! mamma!"

Then, when she felt she was going mad, as mad as she had been the night she fled over the snow, she rose up and ran to the window for fresh air, to drink in the pure air which was not the air of that bed, the air of that dead one.

The mown lawns, the trees, the heath, the sea in the distance, were resting in calm peace, slumbering in the moon's tender charm. A little of the soothing softness inspired Jeanne, and she began slowly weeping.

Then she returned to the bed and sat down, taking her mother's hand again in her own, as if she had been watched over in her illness.

A big insect had come in, attracted by the candles. It struck the walls like a ball, went from one end of the room to the other. Jeanne, distracted by its buzzing flight, raised her eyes to look at it; but she never saw anything but its shadow wandering over the white ceiling.

Presently she heard it no more. She then noticed the faint ticking of the clock, and another slight noise, or, rather, an almost imperceptible rustling. It was her mother's watch that was still going, forgotten in the dress which had been thrown on the chair at the foot of the bed. And suddenly a vague relation between the dead one and the mechanism, which had not stopped, revived the piercing pain in Jeanne's heart.

She looked at the time. It was hardly half-past ten; and she was seized with a dreadful fear at having to spend the entire night there.

Other memories came back to her: those of her own life—Rosalie, Gilberte—the bitter disillusions of her heart. Everything, then, was merely wretchedness, disappointment, unhappiness and death. Everything deceived, lied, caused suffering and sorrow. Where could one find a little rest and joy? No doubt, in another existence! When the soul was delivered from the ordeal of earth. The soul! She started dreaming about that unplumbed mystery, yielding suddenly to poetic convictions which were immediately upset by other hypotheses of equal vagueness. Where was her mother's soul now? the soul of that motionless, icy body? Very far off, perhaps. Somewhere in space? but where? Evaporated like the perfume of a big flower? or wandering like an invisible bird, escaped from its cage?

Called back to God? or scattered fortuitously among new creations, mingled with germs about to flourish forth?

Very near, perhaps? In that room, hovering about that lifeless flesh which it had abandoned?

And all at once Jeanne believed she felt a breath touching her, like the contact of a spirit. She was afraid, fearfully afraid; so panic-stricken that she did not dare to move or breathe, or turn round to look behind her. Her heart was beating as in deathly terror.

And suddenly the invisible insect resumed its flight, and began dashing against the walls in its gyrations. She shuddered from head to foot, then, suddenly reassured when she recognized the buzzing of the winged insect, she got up, and turned round. Her eyes fell on the sphinx-headed writing-desk, the receptacle of the relics.

And a curious, affectionate thought came to her; namely, to read, on that last vigil, just as she would have done with a book of devotion, the old letters which were dear to the dead one. It seemed to her she was about to fulfil a delicate, sacred duty, something truly filial, which would give pleasure in the other world to her mamma.

It was the old correspondence between her grandfather and grandmother, whom she had not known. She wanted to stretch her arms out to them over their daughter's body, to go towards them on that funereal night, as if they, too, had suffered, to form a kind of mysterious chain of tenderness between those who were long dead, the one who had just gone in her turn, and herself who still remained on earth.

She arose, and took from the drawer at the bottom of the writing-desk ten small packets of yellow papers, tied carefully with string, and arranged side by side.

She put them all on the bed, in the Baroness's

arms, with a sort of sentimental refinement, and began reading.

They were old letters, such as you find in ancient family secretaires, letters that smell of another century.

The first began with "My dearest;" another with "My beautiful granddaughter;" then there were "My dear little one"—"My darling"—"My adored daughter"—then "My dear child"—"My dear Adélaïde"—"My dear daughter"—according as they were addressed to the little girl, the young girl, and, later, the young wife.

And it was all full of passionate, childlike affection, a thousand little intimate touches, those great, simple incidents of home, so trivial to outsiders; "father has the influenza; the servant Hortense has burnt her finger; the cat "Croquerat" is dead; they have sawn down the fir on the right of the gate; mother lost her mass-book as she came back from church, she thinks it has been stolen."

They also mentioned people unknown to Jeanne, whose names she vaguely remembered having heard in her childhood.

Her heart grew tender over these details, which seemed revelations to her; as if she had suddenly entered into her mother's whole past, secret life, her heart-life. She looked at the body lying there; and all at once she set about reading out loud, reading for the dead one, as if to distract, to comfort her.

And the motionless corpse seemed happy.

One by one she put back the letters on the foot

of the bed; and she thought they should be put in the coffin, just as with flowers.

She untied another packet. It was a new handwriting. She began: "I can no longer do without your caresses. I love you to madness."

Nothing more; no name.

She turned over the letter without understanding. The address was clearly "Madame la Baronne Le Perthuis des Vauds."

Then she opened the following: "Come this evening, as soon as he has gone out. We shall have an hour. I adore you."

In another: "I have spent a delirious night in vainly desiring you. I had your body in my arms, your mouth on my lips, your eyes under mine. And then I felt furious enough to throw myself out of the window at the idea, that at that very hour you were sleeping beside him, that he possessed you when he pleased——"

Jeanne was shocked; she did not understand.

What was that? To whom, for whom, about whom were these words of love?

She continued, always lighting upon wild declarations of love, assignations accompanied by warnings to be careful, and always, at the end, were the six words: "Above all things, burn this letter."

Finally she opened a commonplace note, a simple acceptance of an invitation to dinner, but in the same handwriting, and signed: "Paul d'Ennemare," the man whom the Baron called, when he still spoke of him, "My poor old Paul," whose wife had been the Baroness's best friend.

Jeanne was then all at once touched by a suspicion, which forthwith became a certainty. Her mother had had him for a lover.

And suddenly, her head swimming, she shook away from her those disgraceful papers, as she would have shaken off some poisonous animal that had climbed on to her, and she ran to the window, and began to cry frightfully, with involuntary screams that rent her breast; then, breaking down entirely, she crouched at the foot of the wall, and, hiding her face in the curtain, so that her groans could not be heard, she sobbed, drowned in bottomless despair.

She would perhaps have stopped like that all night; but a noise of steps in the neighbouring room made her jump up. Perhaps it was her father? And all the letters lay on the bed and floor! It would be enough if he only opened one! And he would know all!

She bestirred herself, and, taking up in handfuls all the old yellow papers, both her grandparents' and the lover's and those she had not unfolded, and those which were still tied up in the drawers of the writing-desk, she threw them into the fireplace in a heap. She then took one of the candles which were burning on the night-table and set fire to the pile of letters. A big flame burst forth which lit up the room, the bed, and the corpse with a bright, flickering light, outlining in black on the white curtain at the end of the bed the wavering profile of the rigid face and the lines of the huge body beneath the sheet.

When there was merely a heap of cinders on the hearth, she turned round and sat near the open

window, as if she no longer dared remain near the dead one, and she started weeping again, her face in her hands, moaning in a heartrending tone, a tone of desolate plaintiveness: "Oh, my poor mamma! Oh, my poor mamma!"

And a ghastly notion came to her:—If, by chance, her mother was not dead, she was only sleeping in a lethargic slumber, if she were suddenly to get up, to speak—would the knowledge of the dreadful secret lessen her filial love? would she kiss her with the same pious lips? would she cherish her with the same sacred affection? No! It was not possible! And this thought tore her heart asunder.

Night was departing; the stars were paling; it was the fresh hour that precedes daylight. The declining moon was about to bury itself in the sea, to the whole surface of which it lent its glitter.

And Jeanne remembered the night spent at the window when she arrived at Les Peuples. How far off it was, how changed everything was, how different the future seemed to her!

And lo! the sky became pink, with a joyous, amorous, charming pink. She gazed, surprised now as if at some strange phenomenon, at that radiant break of day, asking herself if it was possible that there was neither joy nor happiness on this earth, where such dawns were seen.

A noise at the door startled her. It was Julien. He asked: "Well, aren't you over-tired?"

She gasped out "No," glad not to be alone any more. "You must go now and rest," he said. She slowly kissed her mother with a slow, painful, heart-broken kiss; then she went to her room.

The day passed in those sad occupations which death claims for itself. The Baron arrived towards evening. He wept a great deal.

The burial took place next day.

After she had for the last time pressed her lips on the cold forehead, dressed her for the last time, and seen the body nailed down in the coffin, Jeanne went to dress. The guests were about to come.

Gilberte arrived first, and threw herself, sobbing, on her friend's breast.

The carriages could be seen from the window turning at the railing and going off at a trot. And voices resounded in the big hall. Women in black entered the room one by one, women whom Jeanne did not know. The Marquise de Coutelier and the Vicomtesse de Briseville kissed her.

She all at once saw Aunt Lison creeping behind her. And she embraced her tenderly, which nearly sent the old maid into a swoon.

Julien came in in deep mourning, looking elegant, busy, gratified at the assemblage. He spoke to his wife in a low voice about some point on which he wanted her advice. He added in a confidential tone: "All the nobility have come; it will be a very grand affair." And he went away, gravely bowing to the ladies.

Aunt Lison and the Comtesse Gilberte remained alone with Jeanne whilst the funeral ceremony was being performed. The Comtesse kissed her incessantly, repeating: "My poor dear, my poor dear!"

When the Comte de Fourville came to fetch his wife, he cried himself as if he had lost his own mother.

CHAPTER X

The days that followed were very sad, those grey days in a house that seems empty in the absence of the familiar being who has gone for ever, those days punctuated with pain whenever anything is seen which the dead person was in the habit of using. Every moment a memory overwhelms the heart and wounds it. Here is the arm-chair, the umbrella left in the hall, the glass which the maid has not washed! And in all the rooms you find things lying about; scissors, a glove, the book whose leaves are worn by the dead fingers, and a thousand nothings that assume a grievous significance because they recall a thousand small facts.

And the voice of the dead haunts you; you believe you hear it, you would like to run away, anywhere, to escape the haunted house. One has to remain because others are there who also remain and suffer.

And, besides, Jeanne was crushed by the memory of her discovery. The thought weighed on her, her wounded heart did not heal. Her present solitude was enhanced by that horrible secret, her last spark of trustfulness had been extinguished, together with the last spark of belief.

The Baron went away after a time; he had need of movement, of change of air, of escaping from the black grief in which he was sinking deeper and deeper.

And the big house, which, from time to time, witnessed the similar disappearance of one of its masters, resumed its quiet, regular life.

And, next, Paul fell ill. Jeanne nearly went mad, remained twelve days without sleeping, almost without eating.

He recovered; but she was frightened by the idea that he might die. What would she do then? What would become of her? And the vague desire of having another child slowly came into her heart. Soon she dreamt of it; she was entirely consumed by her former longing to have two little children about her, a boy and a girl. And it was an obsession.

But since the Rosalie affair she had been living apart from Julien. A reconciliation even seemed impossible in their present situation. Julien was in love with another woman; she knew it; and the mere thought of submitting anew to his caresses made her shudder with repugnance.

Still, she would have resigned herself to it, so greatly was she tormented by the desire of having another child, but she asked herself, how could they begin their intimacy again? She would have died of humiliation rather than let him guess her intentions; and he did not appear to think about her any more.

She would perchance have given up the idea; but, lo and behold! every night she began dreaming about a daughter; and she saw her playing

with Paul under the plane; and sometimes she felt a kind of itch to get up, and to go, without a word, to her husband in his room. Twice she even crept as far as his door; then she hurried back, her heart beating with shame.

The Baron had gone; her mother was dead; Jeanne had nobody now she might consult, to whom she could confide her intimate secrets.

So she resolved to visit the Abbé Picot, and to inform him, under the seal of confession, of the difficult project she had in view.

She arrived when he was reading his breviary in his little garden planted with fruit-trees.

After talking a few minutes about one thing and another, she stammered out with a blush: "I want to confess, Monsieur l'Abbé."

He was astounded, and put on his spectacles to have a good look at her; then he set off laughing. "But you oughtn't to have any big sins on your conscience." She was altogether confused, and rejoined: "No, but I want to ask your advice in a matter, a matter so—so—so difficult that I do not dare to talk to you about it in conversation."

He immediately put aside his good-humoured aspect, and assumed a priestly air: "Well, my child, come! I shall listen to you in the confessional."

But she held him back, hesitating, arrested all at once by a sort of scrupulousness about speaking of such delicate things in the seclusion of an empty church.

"Oh! well, no—Monsieur le Curé—I can—I can—if you like—tell you here what brings me to

you. Come, let's sit over there in your little arbour."

They walked there slowly. She was seeking some way of expressing herself, of beginning. They sat down.

Then she began, as if she were confessing: "My father——" then she hesitated, repeated again: "My father——" and held her tongue, quite confused.

He waited, his hands crossed on his belly. Seeing her embarrassment, he encouraged her: "Well, my daughter, one might think you are afraid; come now, be brave."

She made up her mind, like a coward who hurls himself into danger: "My father, I want another child." He did not understand, and gave no answer. Whereupon she explained, confounding the words in her timidity.

"I am alone in life now; my father and my husband are hardly on speaking terms; my mother is dead; and--and——" she whispered, shuddering—"the other day I nearly lost my son! What would have become of me then?"

She was silent. The priest gazed at her in bewilderment: "Well, come to the point."

She repeated: "I should like another child." Whereupon he smiled, accustomed as he was to the gross joking of the peasants, who hardly put themselves out in his presence, and he answered with a sly nod:

"Well, it seems to me it all depends on you."

She raised her frank eyes to him, then stammered in confusion: "But--but—you understand

--since—since—since—you know—the servant—my husband and I live—we live quite separate."

The priest was used to the promiscuities and the undignified morals of the rustics, and was astonished at this revelation; then, all at once, he thought he had guessed the young wife's real desire. He looked at her askance, full of kindly feeling and sympathy with her distress: "Yes; I grasp it perfectly. I understand that your--your widowhood is a burden to you. You are young, healthy. Well, it's natural, only too natural."

He began to smile again, carried away by his cheerful temperament as rural priest; and he gently tapped Jeanne's hand: "It is allowed you, very much allowed you, in fact, by the Commandments. Thou shalt not have carnal desires except in marriage.—You're married, aren't you?"

She, in turn, had not at first understood his insinuations; but, as soon as she did, she was quite taken aback, and reddened, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh! Monsieur le Curé, what are you saying? What are you thinking? I swear to you—I swear to you——" And her voice was choked with sobs.

He was surprised; and he comforted her: "Come! I didn't want to hurt you. I was joking a bit—which is not forbidden honest folk. But reckon on me; you may reckon on me I shall see M. Julien."

She did not know what else to say. She now wanted to refuse an intervention, which she feared would be clumsy and dangerous, but she did not dare to. So she went away, murmuring: "I thank you, Monsieur le Curé."

A week went by. She was living in an anguish of disquiet.

One evening, at dinner, Julien looked at her in a peculiar way, with a certain smile on his lips which she knew he wore when in a chaffing mood. There was even a sort of imperceptibly ironic gallantry in his conduct; and when afterwards they took a stroll in her mother's big avenue, he whispered in her ear: "It seems that we are friends again."

She did not reply. She was looking on the ground at a kind of straight line which was almost invisible at the moment, owing to the grass having grown again. It was the track of the Baroness's foot that was fading, even as a memory fades.

And Jeanne felt her heart shrivel up, overcome by sadness; she felt lost in life, so far away from everybody.

Julien went on: "As for me, I ask for nothing better. I was afraid of displeasing you."

The sun was setting; the air was mild. Jeanne was oppressed by a longing to cry, one of those yearnings for unbosoming herself to a friendly heart, a yearning to clasp some one in her arms, and whisper her troubles. A sob rose to her heart. She opened her arms and threw herself into Julien's arms.

And she cried. He looked in amazement at her hair, unable to see her face, which was hidden on his breast. He fancied she still loved him, and impressed a condescending kiss on her chignon.

They then went in again without a word. He

followed her to her room, and spent the night with her.

And their former relations began again.

* * * * *

She became *enceinte*. Whereupon, plunged in a delirious joy, she shut her door every night, vowing herself to eternal chastity, in an impulse of gratitude towards the vague deity she adored.

She felt again nearly happy, and was amazed at the readiness with which her grief at her mother's death had calmed down. She had imagined herself inconsolable; and lo! in barely two months the recent wound was healing. All that remained was a tender melancholy, like a veil of sorrow cast on her life. No further accident appeared possible to her. Her children would grow up, would love her; she would grow old in tranquillity and contentment, without bothering about her husband.

About the end of September, the Abbé Picot paid a ceremonious visit with a new cassock, which only showed as yet a week's stains; and he introduced his successor, the Abbé Tolbiac. He was quite a young priest, thin and very short, who spoke emphatically, and whose eyes, circled with black and hollow, denoted a violent character.

The old Curé had been appointed Dean of Goderville.

Jeanne felt genuinely sorry at his departure. The worthy man's face was associated with all her memories as a young wife. He had married her, baptized Paul, and buried the Baroness. She could not imagine Étouvent without the Abbé

Picot's paunch passing along the farmyards; and she liked him because he was cheerful and unaffected.

He did not seem joyful, in spite of his promotion. "It costs me dear, it costs me dear, Madame la Comtesse," he declared. "I've been here eighteen years. Oh! the living brings in little and isn't worth much. The men have as little religion as possible, and the women, the women, you know, have hardly any morals. The girls only go to church to be married after making a pilgrimage to Notre Dame du Gros Ventre, and the orange-flower is not expensive in these parts. All the same, I love the place."

The new Curé made some impatient gestures, and grew crimson. "All that will have to be altered with me," he observed abruptly. He had the look of a cross child, so frail and thin was he in his cassock, which was already worn out, but clean.

The Abbé Picot eyed him sideways, as he used to do in his merry moods, and rejoined: "Well, Abbé, to prevent these things you will have to chain up your parishioners; and even that would be no good."

"We shall see," replied the little priest, in a cutting tone. And the old Curé smiled, as he took a pinch of snuff: "Age will tone you down, Abbé, and experience, too; you will alienate from the Church the last of your flock; that's all. People are believers in these parts; but by Jove! take care. My word! when I see a girl come to mass who appears to me a bit stout, I say to myself: She's going to bring me another parishioner;—

and I try to marry her. You won't prevent them going astray, you'll see; but you can go and find the young man and prevent him from deserting the mother. Marry them, Abbé, marry them; don't bother about anything else."

"We think differently; it's useless to dwell on the point," rudely retorted the new Curé. And the Abbé Picot began again regretting his village, the sea which he could perceive from the presbytery windows, the little funnel-shaped valleys, where he went to recite his breviary, whilst beholding the ships passing in the distance.

And the two priests took leave. The elder one kissed Jeanne, who nearly cried.

A week later the Abbé Tolbiac returned. He spoke of the reforms he was accomplishing as might a prince taking possession of a kingdom. He then begged the Vicomtesse not to miss the mass on Sundays, and to communicate on all the fête-days.

"You and I," he remarked, "are the heads of the district; we have to govern it and always set a good example. We must join forces in order to be powerful and respected. When Church and Château go hand in hand, the cottage will fear and obey us."

Jeanne's religion consisted entirely of sentiment; she had that dreamy faith which always belongs to a woman; and, if she fairly fulfilled her religious duties, it was more especially owing to a habit she had retained from the convent, since the Baron's carping philosophy had overthrown her convictions a long time ago.

The Abbé Picot contented himself with the little

she could give him, and never reproached her. But his successor, when he did not see her at mass on Sunday, went to the château disturbed in mind and severe in language.

She did not want to break with the Curé, and promised reform, reserving to herself the right of only showing herself assiduous during the first few weeks, out of complaisance.

Gradually, however, she acquired the habit of church-going, and submitted to the influence of the frail priest, who was both sincere and strong of will. A mystic, he pleased her by his exaltations and ardours. He made vibrate in her the chord of religious poetry, which all women have in their souls. His uncompromising austerity, his contempt for the world and sensualities, his disgust at human pre-occupations, his love of God, his youthful, savage inexperience, his hard words, his inflexible will, gave Jeanne the impression of a man made of the stuff of martyrs; and she let herself be fascinated, she who had already suffered and been disillusioned, by the rigid fanaticism of this boy, a minister of Heaven.

He led her to Christ the Consoler, showing her how the pious joys of religion would alleviate all her sufferings; and she knelt in the confessional, humbling herself, feeling puny and weak before this priest, who seemed about fifteen.

He was, however, quickly detested throughout the country.

Being unyieldingly severe to himself, he showed himself implacably intolerant to others. One thing particularly roused his wrath and indignation—love. He spoke about it in his sermons

with fury, in crude terms, after the ecclesiastical manner, hurling thundering periods against concupiscence at his rustic audience; and he trembled with rage, and stamped his foot, as his mind was haunted by the images he evoked in his outbursts.

The young men and the girls gave each other sidelong glances across the church; and the old peasants, who always like to joke about such matters, disapproved of the little Curé's intolerance, as they returned to their farms after mass, by the side of their blue-bloused sons and their black-shawled wives. And the whole district was in an uproar.

People told each other in whispers about his severities in the confessional, the severe penances he inflicted; and, as he persisted in refusing absolution to girls whose chastity was not above reproach, there was an undercurrent of jeering. They laughed when, at the high masses of the *fêtes*, they saw young men and women remaining on their benches, instead of going and communicating with the others.

Presently, he played the spy on lovers to prevent them meeting, like a keeper pursuing poachers. He hunted them along the ditches behind the barns, on moonlit nights, and in the clumps of sea-rushes on the slopes of the little downs.

He once discovered a pair who did not walk apart when he appeared; they held each other by the waist, and kissed as they strolled along a ravine filled with stones.

"Stop it at once, you beasts!"

Whereupon the young man turned round and

answered: "Mind your own business, M'sieu l'Curé; it's nothing to do with you."

The Abbé then picked up some stones, and threw at them, as if they were dogs.

The couple ran away, laughing; and, the following Sunday, he denounced them by name, before the whole congregation.

The young peasants all stopped going to mass.

The Curé dined at the château every Thursday, and often came during the week to talk with his penitent. She would become ecstatic, like him, would discuss immaterial things, and use all the old, complex arsenal of religious controversy.

They would walk along the Baroness's grand avenue, talking of Christ and the Apostles, and of the Virgin and the Fathers of the Church, as if they had known them. They sometimes stopped to put each other profound questions, which caused them to wander into mysticism, she losing herself in poetic arguments that went up to the heavens like rockets, he arguing more precisely, like a monomaniacal lawyer who wanted to prove the squaring of the circle mathematically.

Julien treated the new Curé with great respect, continually repeating: "That priest suits me, he does not compromise." And he readily confessed and communicated, lavishly setting a good example.

He now went almost daily to the Fourvilles, shooting with the husband, who could no longer live without him, and riding with the Comtesse, in spite of the rain and heavy weather.

"They are mad about riding," observed the Comte, "but it does my wife good."

The Baron came back about the middle of November. He was changed, aged, broken down, steeped in a black gloom which had penetrated his mind. And, all at once, the love that bound him to his daughter seemed to increase, as if those few months of desolate loneliness had sharpened his hunger for affection, trust and tenderness.

Jeanne did not confide to him her new ideas, her intimacy with the Abbé Tolbiac, and her religious zeal; but, the first time he saw the priest, he felt a vehement dislike for him.

So, when the young wife asked him in the evening: "How do you like him?" he replied: "That man is an inquisitor! He must be very dangerous!"

Presently, when he heard from the peasants, whose friend he was, about the young priest's harshness and violence, the kind of persecution he waged against inborn laws and instincts, his heart was filled with hatred for him.

The Baron was of the race of the old philosophers who worshipped nature. His affections were stirred when he saw two animals coupling, and he adored a kind of pantheistic deity; but he bristled up at the conception of a God full of bourgeois intentions, Jesuitical wrath and tyrannical revenge, a God who belittled in his eyes the inevitable, limitless, omnipotent creation as we see it, the creation which is life, light, earth, thought, plant, rock, man, air, beast, star, God, and insect as well, creating because it is creation, stronger than a will, vaster than a reasoning, producing without object, without reason and without end, in all directions and in all forms throughout

infinite space, according to the necessities of chance and the neighbourhood of the suns that warm the worlds.

Creation contained all germs, thought and life developing in it like the flowers and fruits on the trees.

For him, therefore, reproduction was the great general law, the sacred, honourable, divine act, which fulfils the obscure and constant will of the Universal Being. And he began, from farm to farm, an ardent campaign against the intolerant priest, who was a persecutor of life.

Jeanne, in her grief, prayed to the Lord, implored her father to desist; but he always retorted: "Such men must be combated, it's our right and our duty. They're not human." He repeated, shaking his long, white hair: "They are not human; they understand nothing, nothing, nothing. They act under the influence of a fatal dream; they are anti-physical." And he shouted: "Anti-physical!" as if he had uttered a curse.

The priest well knew him for an enemy, but, as he intended to remain master of the château and of the young wife, he temporized, sure of final victory.

A fixed idea next haunted him; he had accidentally discovered the amours of Julien and Gilberte, and he wanted to break them off at all costs.

He came one day to pay Jeanne a visit, and, after a long mystical conversation, he asked her to join with him in fighting, in destroying the evil in her own family, in saving two souls that were in danger.

She did not understand, and wanted to know

his meaning. He answered: "The hour has not yet come; I shall see you again soon." And he went away abruptly.

Winter was then nearing its end, a "rotten" winter, as they say in the country, damp and warm.

The Abbé came again a few days later, and spoke in vague terms of one of those unworthy *liaisons* between people who ought to be above reproach. It was the duty, said he, of those who knew the facts, to use every means of stopping it. Then he entered on one of his lofty argumentations, and, presently, taking Jeanne's hand, he conjured her to open her eyes, to understand and help him.

She understood that time, but was silent, frightened at the thought of all the misery that might arise in the house, which was now so quiet; and she feigned not to know what the Abbé meant. Whereupon he no longer hesitated, but spoke straight out.

"It's a painful duty I have to perform, Madame la Comtesse, but I cannot act otherwise. The ministry I hold ordains me not to leave you in ignorance of what you may prevent. I tell you that your husband has a criminal friendship with Madame de Fourville."

She bent her head in powerless resignation.

The priest went on: "What do you think of doing now?"

"What do you want me to do, Monsieur l'Abbé?" she gasped.

"To throw yourself in the way of this guilty passion," he replied violently.

She began to cry, and in a heart-broken voice: "But he has already deceived me with a servant; he doesn't listen to me; he doesn't love me any more; he ill-treats me whenever I express a desire that does not suit him. What can I do?"

Without answering directly, the Curé exclaimed: "So you yield to it! you resign yourself! you consent! The adultery is beneath your roof; and you tolerate it! The crime is being perpetrated under your eyes, and you turn them away from it! Are you a wife? A Christian? A mother?"

"What do you want me to do?" she sobbed.

"Anything rather than allow such infamy," he rejoined. "Anything! I tell you. Leave him. Flee from this defiled house."

"But I have no money, Monsieur l'Abbé," she observed; "and, besides, I have no courage now; and, then, how can I leave him without proofs? I have not even the right to do so."

The priest arose, quivering with anger: "Cowardice is your counsellor, Madam. I thought you different. You are unworthy of God's mercy!"

She fell at his knees: "Oh! I implore you, don't desert me, advise me!"

"Open M. de Fourville's eyes," he remarked curtly. "It's his duty to break off the *liaison.*"

She was terrified at the idea: "But he would kill them! Monsieur l'Abbé! And should I be the one to denounce them? Oh! not that! never!"

He then raised his hand as if to curse her, beside himself with wrath: "Remain in your shame and in your crime; for you are more guilty than they.

You are a complaisant wife! I have nothing more to do with this place."

And he went off, so furious that his whole body trembled.

She followed him in distraction, ready to yield, beginning to promise. But he continued quivering with indignation, walking rapidly and shaking in his rage his big blue umbrella which was almost as high as himself.

He perceived Julien standing near the gate, directing some pruning work; so he turned to the left to cross the Couillards' farm; and kept repeating: "Leave me, Madame, I have nothing more to say to you."

Right in his way, in the middle of the farmyard, a number of children belonging to the house and the neighbours were crowding about the kennel of the bitch Mirza, and were watching something curiously, with a concentrated, mute attention. In the midst of them, the Baron, too, his hands behind his back, was looking on with curiosity. You would have taken him for a schoolmaster. When, however, he saw the priest at a distance, he went away, in order to avoid meeting, greeting, or speaking to him.

"Leave me to myself a few days, Monsieur l'Abbé," said Jeanne entreatingly, "and then come again to the château. I shall tell you what I have been able to do, and what I have arranged; and we can talk over things."

They were then approaching the group of children; and the Curé went near, to see what was interesting them so much. It was the bitch whelping. In front of the kennel five pups were

already groping round their mother, who tenderly licked them as she lay stretched out on her side, in pain. At the moment the priest bent down to look, a sixth tiny pup appeared. Whereat all the youngsters, in an outburst of glee, began clapping their hands and crying out: "There's another! there's another!" It was an amusement, a natural amusement into which nothing impure entered. They looked on at the whelping, just as they would have looked at apples falling.

The Abbé Tolbiac was at first dumbfounded, then, seized by an irresistible fury, he lifted his big umbrella and began striking among the crowd of children's heads with all his strength. The frightened youngsters ran away as hard as they could; and he found himself suddenly before the labouring bitch that was struggling to rise. He, however, did not let her even get on her legs, and, losing his head, began to beat her down with the full force of his arm. Chained up as she was, she could not run away, and moaned horribly whilst writhing beneath the blows. He broke his umbrella. Then, his hands being unarmed, he jumped on her, frantically trampling her under-foot, stamping on her, crushing her. Beneath his pressure a final pup was brought into the world; and with savage heel he dispatched the bleeding body which still moved among the whining pups, blind and awkward, that were already seeking for the teats.

Jeanne had fled; but the priest suddenly felt himself taken by the neck; a box on the ear knocked his hat off; and the Baron, in his exasperation, carried him to the fence and threw him into the road.

When M. le Perthuis turned round, he saw his daughter on her knees, sobbing in the middle of the pups, and gathering them up in her skirt. He rushed up to her, gesticulating, and shouted: "There you have him, there you have him, the man in a cossack! Have you seen what he is, now?"

The farm-hands had run up, and they were all looking at the disembowelled dog, and Coullard's wife cried: "Could anybody be as cruel as that?"

Meanwhile Jeanne had picked up the seven pups, and declared she would bring them up.

They tried to give them milk, three died the next day. Old Simon then went round to find a foster-mother for the pups. He could not find one, but brought back a she cat, declaring she would do. Three more pups were then killed, and the last was entrusted to this wet-nurse of another race. She adopted it immediately, and, lying down on her side, gave it her teat.

That it might not exhaust its foster-mother, the pup was weaned a fortnight after, and Jeanne herself undertook to find it with a feeding-bottle. She had called it "Toto." The Baron altered its name, and rechristened it "Massacre."

The priest did not go again to Jeanne, but the following Sunday he launched from the pulpit imprecations, maledictions and menaces against the château, declaring its wounds should be seared with a red-hot iron, anathematizing the Baron who laughed at him, and making a veiled, but timid, allusion to Julien's amours. The Vicomte was exasperated, but the fear of an awful scandal extinguished his wrath.

Then, sermon after sermon, the priest went on

calling down vengeance on them, prophesying that the hour of God was approaching, that all His enemies would be smitten.

Julien wrote to the archbishop a respectful, but vigorous letter. The Abbé Tolbiac was threatened with disgrace. He grew silent.

He could now be met, making long, solitary excursions, striding along with an excited expression. Gilberte and Julien frequently saw him during their rides, sometimes at a distance, like a black point at the end of a plain, or on the edge of the cliff, sometimes reading his breviary in some narrow valley they were about to enter. They would then turn about, in order not to pass near him.

Spring had come, revivifying their love, throwing them every day into one another's arms, now here, now there, under any shelter they might meet with in their expeditions.

As the leaves of the trees were still young, and the grass damp, and they could not, as in the middle of summer, bury themselves in the undergrowth of the woods, they had generally utilized, for the hiding of their embraces, a shepherd's movable hut, which had been abandoned since the autumn on the summit of the Vaucotte hill.

It stood there, high on its wheels, quite by itself, five hundred metres from the cliff, just at the point where the steep descent into the valley began. They could not be surprised in it, because it dominated the level ground; and their horses, fastened to the shafts, waited till they were tired of kisses.

But lo! one day, just as they were leaving this

shelter, they perceived the Abbé Tolbiac sitting almost hidden among the sea-rushes on the down.

"We must leave our horses in the ravine," said Julien; "they might otherwise betray us a long way off." And they accustomed themselves to tying up the animals in a recess of the valley, crowded with brushwood.

Next, one evening, as they were both returning to La Vrillette, where they were to dine with the Comte, they met the Curé of Étouvent leaving the château. He stood aside to let them pass; and bowed, without meeting their eyes.

They felt some anxiety, which soon vanished.

* * * * *

Now, Jeanne was reading near the fire one afternoon, when there was a gale blowing (it was the beginning of May), when she suddenly caught sight of the Comte de Fourville coming up on foot and at such a pace that she believed an accident had happened.

She came down quickly to receive him, and, when she was face to face with him, she thought he had gone mad. He wore a large fur cap which he only used at home, and was dressed in his shooting-jacket, and looked so pale that his red moustache, which usually did not show up on his healthy complexion, seemed like a flame. And his eyes were haggard; they rolled about as if void of thought.

He gasped out: "My wife is here, isn't she?"

"No, I haven't seen her to-day," answered Jeanne, losing all composure.

Whereupon he sat down, as if his legs had been crushed; he took off his cap, and mechanically

wiped his forehead several times with his handkerchief; then, starting up, he advanced towards the young wife, both his hands stretched out, his mouth open, ready to speak, to confide to her some fearful grief; then he stopped, stared at her, and remarked in a delirious kind of way: "But it's your husband—you also——" And he ran off towards the sea.

Jeanne ran to stop him, entreating him, her heart wild with terror as she thought: "He knows everything! What's he going to do? Oh! that he may not find them!"

However, she could not catch him up, and he did not listen. He was going straight on without hesitation, sure of his mark. He crossed the ditch, and then, trampling through the sea-rushes with huge strides, he reached the cliff.

Jeanne, standing on the tree-covered slope, followed him for a long time with her eyes; presently, losing sight of him, she went back, in tortures of anguish.

He had turned to the right, and had started running. The sea was white with rough billows; big, black clouds scurried along with incredible speed, passed by, and were followed by others; and each cloud poured a furious shower on the downs. The wind hissed, groaned, beat down the grass, laid low the young crops, carried away, like flecks of foam, big white birds which it drove far away into the fields.

The gusts of rain beat in the Comte's face, wetted his cheeks and moustaches down which the water dripped, filled his ears with noise and his heart with tumult.

There, in front of him, the Vaucotte valley displayed its deep bosom. There was nothing between but a shepherd's hut near a vacant sheep-run. Two horses were tied to the shafts of the movable shelter. What could one have to fear in such a storm?

As soon as he perceived the horses, the Comte lay down on the ground, then dragged himself along on hands and knees, looking like a sort of monster, with his big body soiled with mud, and his hairy cap He crawled up to the lonely cabin, and hid beneath it, so as not to be discovered through the fissures in the planks.

The horses, which had seen him, were disturbed. He slowly cut the reins with his knife, which he held open in his hand, and, as a hurricane had come on, the animals fled away, excited by the hail that dashed against the sloping roof of the wooden hut, making it tremble on its wheels

Then the Comte, rising to his knees, fixed his eye to the bottom of the door and looked inside.

He did not move, he seemed to be waiting. A rather long time went by, and suddenly he jumped up, muddy from head to foot. With a savage gesture he pushed the bolt which shut the shelter on the outside, and, seizing the shafts, he began shaking the cabin as if he wanted to break it to pieces. Then suddenly, bending his tall figure in a desperate effort, he harnessed himself to it, and dragged it along like a bull, panting; and he pulled the moving cot and those it contained towards the steep declivity. Those inside shouted, beating

against the door with their fists, not understanding what was occurring.

When he had reached the top of the incline, he let go of the light cabin, which began rolling down the slope.

It hurried on its course, rushing madly down, ever going quicker, jumping, springing like an animal, beating the ground with its shafts.

An old beggar, crouching in a ditch, saw it pass over his head at one bound; and he heard fearful screams coming from the wooden box.

Suddenly it lost a wheel, torn off by a collision, it fell on its side, and began to roll over and over like a ball, just as an uprooted house would dash down from a mountain-top. Then, reaching the edge of the last ravine, it gave a jump, describing a curve, and falling to the bottom was smashed like an egg-shell.

When it lay broken on the rocky ground, the old tramp, who had seen it pass, went down slowly through the brambles, and, actuated by peasant prudence, not daring to approach the disembowelled cabin, he went to the nearest farm and told of the accident.

The people rushed up; the *débris* were raised; and two bodies were brought to sight. They were bruised, crushed, bleeding. The man had his forehead laid open and his whole face smashed up. The woman's jaw was hanging loose, broken away in some shock; and their broken limbs were soft, as if there were no bones under the skin.

Still, they were recognized, and the bystanders began to argue at length about the causes of the disaster.

"What were they doing in the cot?" asked a woman. Whereupon, the old tramp related that they had apparently taken refuge there in order to be sheltered from the storm, and that the furious gale must have overturned the hut and hurled it down. And he explained that he was himself going to take refuge there, when he had seen the horses tied to the shafts, and understood from that that the place was occupied.

"If it hadn't been so, I should have shared their fate," he added, with a satisfied look.

"Perhaps it would have been better," said a voice. Whereupon the worthy man worked himself into a fearful rage.

"Why should it have been better? Because I'm poor and they're rich! Look at 'em now." And trembling, ragged, drenched in rain, looking filthy with his tangled beard and his long hair flowing from under his battered hat, he pointed to the two corpses with the end of his hooked stick; and he observed: "We're all equal, like that."

Meanwhile other peasants had come up, and were looking on askance, with restless, cunning, frightened, selfish, cowardly eyes Next they considered what to do; and it was decided, in the hope of a reward, that the bodies should be taken to their châteaux. So, two carts were harnessed. But a fresh difficulty arose. Some wanted simply to furnish the bottom of the waggons with straw; others opined that the correct thing was to put mattresses there.

"But the mattresses would be steeped in blood," exclaimed the woman who had already

spoken. "They'd have to be washed in *eau de javelle.*"

"They'll pay for them," rejoined a fat, jovial-faced farmer. "The more they're worth the dearer they'll be." The argument was decisive.

And the two carts, standing high on springless wheels, went off at a trot, one to the right, the other to the left, shaking and jolting, at every big rut the remains of those beings who had been clasped in each other's arms and would never meet again.

The Comte, as soon as he saw the cabin rolling down the steep descent, had fled away as speedily as he could through the rain and the storm. He ran like that for several hours, cutting across high-roads, jumping down slopes, bursting through hedges; and he had returned home at nightfall, without knowing how.

The frightened servants were waiting for him, and told him that the two horses had just returned without their riders, Julien's horse having followed the other.

M. de Fourville staggered, and, in a broken voice: "Some accident must have happened to them in this dreadful weather. Let everybody go and look for them."

He went off again himself, but, as soon as he was out of sight, he hid himself under a bush, watching the road by which the woman he still loved with a wild passion was about to return, dead, or dying, or, perhaps, mutilated, disfigured for ever.

And soon a cart passed him, carrying something strange.

It stopped before the château, and then entered. It was that, yes, it was She, but a terrible anguish nailed him to the spot, a horrible fear of knowing, a dread of the truth and he did not move, crouching like a hare, trembling at the least noise

He waited one hour, two hours perhaps The cart did not leave He said to himself his wife was dying, and the thought of seeing her, of meeting her gaze, filled him with such horror, that he was all at once afraid of being discovered in his hiding-place and compelled to return home in order to witness her agony, and he fled away again right into the middle of the wood Then he suddenly reflected that perhaps she had need of help, that probably there was no one to take care of her, and he ran back in a frantic hurry

On entering he met his gardener, and cried out: "Well?" The man did not venture to reply. Then "Is she dead?" M de Fourville nearly yelled And the servant stammered. "Yes, Monsieur le Comte"

He felt immensely relieved A sudden calm entered his blood and quivering muscles, and he went firmly up the steps of the grand perron.

The other waggon had reached Les Peuples. Jeanne discerned it from afar, saw the mattress, guessed that a body was lying on it, and understood everything Her emotion was so acute that she fainted away

When she recovered consciousness, her father was holding her head, and moistening her temples with vinegar.

"Do you know?" he inquired hesitatingly.

"Yes, papa," she murmured. But, when she

wanted to get up, she was unable, so great was her suffering

That very night she was confined of a dead child, a girl

She saw nothing of Julien's burial, she knew nothing about it She only noticed, after a day or two, that Aunt Lison had come again; and, among the feverish nightmares that haunted her, she persistently tried to remember since when the old maid had left Les Peuples, at what period, under what circumstances She could not recall it, even in her lucid hours, and was certain only that she had seen her after her mother's death.

CHAPTER XI

JEANNE remained three months in her room, and became so weak and so pale that she was believed, and declared, to be done for. Afterwards she gradually picked up again. Her father and Aunt Lison, who were both installed at Les Peuples, did not leave her. The shock had given her a kind of nervous illness, the least noise brought on swooning, and she would fall into long fainting-fits as the result of the most trifling causes.

She had never asked for details about Julien's death. What did it matter to her? Did she not know enough about it? Everybody believed it was an accident, but she was not deceived, and she retained in her heart the secret that tortured her, the knowledge of his adultery, and the vision of the Comte's abrupt, terrible visit on the day of the catastrophe.

So now her soul was penetrated by tender, sweet and melancholy memories of the brief joys of love which her husband had once inspired her with. She was continually quivering at unexpected re-awakenings of his memory; and she saw him again as he had been during their days of betrothal, and also as she had cherished him in her only hours of passion that took place beneath the hot sun of

Corsica. All his faults diminished, all his harshness vanished, even his infidelities were now fading in the growing distance of the closed grave. And Jeanne, filled with a sort of vague, posthumous gratitude to the man who had clasped her in his arms, forgave him her past sufferings and thought only of their happy moments Presently time wore on, and month following on month covered with oblivion, as with accumulated dust, all her memories and her griefs, and she devoted herself entirely to her son

He became the idol, the sole thought of the three persons gathered around him, and he ruled them like a despot There was even a kind of jealousy between his three slaves, Jeanne looked on anxiously at the big kisses he gave the Baron, after he had ridden a cock-horse on his knee And Aunt Lison, who was neglected by him even as she had always been by everybody, and treated at times like a servant by this master who could hardly speak yet, would go and cry in her room, whilst she compared the trifling caresses humbly begged for by her and obtained with difficulty, with the embraces which he reserved for his mother and grandfather

Two quiet, uneventful years passed in incessant pre-occupation about the child At the beginning of the third winter it was decided to go and live at Rouen till the spring; and the whole family emigrated. When, however, they came to occupy the old house, which had been left empty and become damp, Paul had so serious an attack of bronchitis that pleurisy was feared, and his three distracted relations declared that he could not do

without the air of Les Peuples. He was taken back there as soon as he was well.

Then began a series of monotonous, placid years.

They were always busied about the child together, now in his bedroom, now in the big drawing-room, now in the garden, they went into ecstasies over his lisping, his funny expressions, his gestures.

His mother affectionately called him "Paulet." He could not pronounce the word and said "Poulet," which gave rise to endless laughter. The surname "Poulet" remained. He was never after called otherwise.

As he grew quickly, one of the exciting occupations of the three relations whom the Baron nick-named "his three mothers," was to measure his height.

They had cut on the wainscoting near the drawing-room door a series of small penknife-marks indicating from month to month the progress of his growth. That ladder, baptized "Poulet's ladder," held a noteworthy place in everybody's life.

Afterwards, a fresh individual came to play an important part in the family, the dog "Massacre," who had been neglected during Jeanne's sole attention to her son. Brought up by Ludivine, and kennelled in an old barrel in front of the stables it lived alone, always on the chain.

One morning Paul noticed it, and began to cry out so that he might go and kiss it. He was taken up to it with infinite fears. The dog made a fuss about the child, who howled when they wanted to separate them. Accordingly Massacre was let loose and installed in the house.

It became Paul's inseparable friend. They rolled about together, slept side by side on the carpet. Presently, Massacre slept in his companion's bed, who refused to leave him. Jeanne was sometimes vexed because of the fleas; and Aunt Lison was angry with the dog for absorbing so large a part of the child's affection, affection stolen by that animal, it seemed to her, affection she would so much have desired for herself.

Rare visits were exchanged with the Brisevilles and the Coutelers The mayor and the doctor were the only regular invaders of the lonely old château Jeanne, since the murder of the bitch and the suspicions the priest had instilled into her at the time of the horrible death of the Comtesse and Julien, no longer went to church, indignant at the God who could have such ministers.

From time to time, the Abbé Tolbiac anathematized in direct terms the château haunted by the Spirit of Evil, the Spirit of Eternal Revolt, the Spirit of Error and Lying, the Spirit of Iniquity, the Spirit of Corruption and Impurity. Those were his names for the Baron.

However, his church was deserted; and when he walked along fields where the labourers were working the plough, the peasants did not stop to speak to him, did not turn aside to greet him. He passed, moreover, for a sorcerer, because he had cast out the devil from a woman possessed. He knew, they said, mysterious words to dispel charms, which were, according to him, merely a species of Satan's tricks. He laid his hands on cows that gave poor milk, and could discover lost objects by means of a few unknown phrases.

His narrow, fanatical spirit was passionately devoted to the study of religious books containing the history of the devil's appearances on earth, the various manifestations of his power, his occult and diverse influences, all his different resources, and the usual types of his stratagems. And, as he believed himself especially called to combat this mysterious and fatal Power, he had learnt all the formulæ of exorcism given in the ecclesiastical manuals.

He believed he continually felt the shadow of the Evil Spirit lurking in the shadows, and the Latin phrase was ever on his lips: "Sicut leo rugiens circuit quaerens quem devoret"

Next, there spread abroad a fear, a terror of his hidden power. Even his colleagues, ignorant country priests, to whom Beelzebub is an article of faith, and who, worried by the minute prescriptions of the rites to be observed in case of manifestations of the Power of Evil, come at length to confuse religion with magic, considered the Abbé Tolbiac to be something of a sorcerer; and they respected him as much for the obscure power they fancied he possessed, as for the unimpeachable austerity of his life.

When he met Jeanne, he did not bow to her.

The position worried and saddened Aunt Lison, who could not understand, in her timid, old-maid's soul, anybody not going to church. She was doubtless pious, no doubt she went to confession and communion; but nobody knew it, or troubled to know.

When she was alone, quite alone, with Paul, she spoke to him, in a low voice, about the good

God. He listened to her a little when she related the miraculous stories about the early periods of the world; but, when she told him he must love the good God a great deal, a great deal, he sometimes rejoined:

"Where is He, aunt?"

She then pointed to the sky with her finger: "Up there, Poulet, but you mustn't talk about it." She was afraid of the Baron.

One day, however, Poulet observed:

"The good God is everywhere, but He is not in the church." He had told his grandfather of his aunt's mysterious revelations.

The child was ten; his mother seemed forty. He was strong, active, bold at climbing trees, but he did not know much. When lessons bored him, he broke them off at once. And, whenever the Baron kept him rather long at a book, Jeanne at once came up and said:

"Let him play now. He should not be tired, he's so young."

In her eyes he was still six months or a year old. She hardly realized that he walked, ran, spoke, like a little man; and she lived in constant fear of his falling, catching cold, getting hot during exercise, eating too much for his digestion or too little for his growth.

When he was twelve, a big difficulty arose over the first communion.

One morning Lison went to Jeanne and pointed out to her that the child could not be left any longer without religious instruction, and without performing his first duties. She argued in every way, giving numberless reasons, and urging, above all,

the opinion of the people they knew. The mother was disturbed and undecided; she hesitated, declaring that they could wait a bit yet.

A month later, however, when she was paying a visit to the Vicomtesse de Briseville, that lady happened to ask:

"This year, I suppose, Paul will have his first communion." And Jeanne, taken unawares, replied:

"Yes, Madame."

These simple words decided her, and, without telling her father anything about it, she begged Lison to take the child to the catechism class.

All went well for a month; but one evening Poulet returned with a sore throat. And the next day he had a cough. His anxious mother asked him about it, and learnt that the Curé had sent him to stay till the end of the lesson at the church door, where there was a draught from the porch, because he had behaved badly.

So she kept him at home and taught him herself the alphabet of religion. But the Abbé Tolbiac, in spite of Lison's entreaties, refused to admit him among the communicants, as having been insufficiently instructed.

It was the same the following year. Whereupon the exasperated Baron swore the child had no need to believe in such twaddle, in the childish symbol of transubstantiation, in order to be an honest man; and it was decided he should be brought up as a Christian, but not as a professing Catholic, and at his coming of age he should be free to become what he liked.

Now, some time afterwards, Jeanne, who had

made a visit to the Briseville, did not receive one in return. She was astonished, knowing her neighbours' punctilious politeness; but the Marquise de Coutelier haughtily told her the cause of this neglect.

Considering herself a kind of queen of the Norman nobility, owing to her husband's position and his authentic title and his remarkable wrath, the Marquise ruled like a real queen, spoke her mind freely, showed herself gracious or severe according to occasion, reproved, put right, congratulated, in everything. When, therefore, Jeanne called on her, this lady, after a few icy words, remarked dryly:

"Society is divided into two classes; the people that believe in God and those who do not. The former, even the humblest, are our friends, our equals; the others are nothing to us."

Jeanne, feeling the attack, retorted:

"But can't one believe in God without frequenting churches?"

"No, Madame," replied the Marquise. "Believers go and pray to God in His Church, as they go and visit human beings in their houses."

"God is everywhere, Madame," rejoined Jeanne, wounded in her feelings. "As for me, who believe in His goodness from the bottom of my heart, I no longer feel Him to be present, when certain priests are between Him and me."

The Marquise rose.

"The priest carries the banner of the Church, Madame; whoever does not follow the banner is against it, and against us."

Jeanne had risen in her turn, quivering.

"You believe, Madame, in a partisan god. I believe in the God of honest people."

She bowed and departed.

The peasants, too, blamed her, amongst themselves, for not letting Poulet go through his first communion. They did not go to mass, did not take the sacraments, or at least only received them at Easter, according to the formal prescriptions of the Church; but it was different with children; and none of them would have been bold enough to bring up a child outside this common law, because religion, after all, is religion.

Of course, she noticed their disapproval, and was indignant in her soul at all these bargainings, these compromises with conscience, this universal fear of everything, this great cowardice lodged at the bottom of all hearts, and, when it reveals itself, adorned with so many respectable masks.

The Baron took over the management of Paul's studies, and set him to learn Latin. His mother had only one piece of advice: "Above all, don't tire him"; and she would wander restlessly near the school-room, as the Baron had forbidden her to go in, because she interrupted the teaching at every moment in order to ask: "Are your feet cold, Poulet?" or: "Have you got a headache, Poulet?" Or she would stop the master with: "Don't make him speak too much, you will tire his throat."

As soon as the boy was free, he went down to do gardening with his mother and aunt. They were now very fond of gardening; and all three of them planted young trees in spring, were passionately interested in sowing seeds and in their

growth; they pruned the branches, and cut flowers for bouquets.

The young man took especial care in the production of salads. He managed four large beds in the kitchen garden, in which, with extreme care, he reared lettuces, endives, cos-lettuce, mustard-cress, all the known species of eatable leaves. He dug, watered, weeded, planted, with the help of his two mothers, whom he made work like day-labourers. You could see them for whole hours on their knees in the beds, soiling their dresses and their hands, busy inserting the roots of young plants in holes they made with one finger thrust right in the ground.

Poulet was growing up, he was nearly fifteen; and the drawing-room "ladder" marked nearly 5 ft. 5 in., but he remained a child in mind, ignorant, silly, stifled as he was between those two petticoats and the amiable old man who was behind the age.

At last the Baron one evening spoke about college; and Jeanne at once began sobbing. Aunt Lison in a fright remained in a dark corner.

"What need has he to know so much?" observed Jeanne. "We shall make a farmer, a country gentleman of him. He will cultivate his estates, as many nobles do. He will live and grow old happily in this house where we shall have lived before him, where we shall die. What more can you wish?"

The Baron, however, shook his head. "What will you answer, if he comes and tells you when he is twenty-five: I am nobody, I know nothing through your fault, through the fault of your

maternal selfishness; I feel unable to work, to become anybody, and yet I was not made for the obscure, humble, and deathly dull life, to which your short-sighted affection has condemned me?"

She continued crying, imploring her son.—"Tell me, Poulet, you will never reproach me for having loved you too much, will you?"

"No, mamma," promised the big boy, in surprise.

"You swear it?"

"Yes, mamma."

"You want to remain here, don't you?"

Whereat the Baron spoke firmly and loudly: "Jeanne, you have not the right to dispose of his life. What you are doing is cowardly and almost criminal, you are sacrificing your child to your personal happiness."

She hid her face in her hands, sobbing violently, and murmured amid her tears: "I was so unhappy—so unhappy! Now that I am at peace with him, he is taken away from me—what will become of me—all alone—now?"

Her father rose up, went and sat near her, took her in his arms.—"And how about me, Jeanne?" She threw her arms at once round his neck, kissed him vehemently, and then, still choking with sobs, she exclaimed: "Yes. You are right, perhaps, dear father. I was mad, but I have suffered so much. I certainly wish him to go to college."

And, without understanding much what was going to happen to him, Poulet in his turn began to weep.

Then his three mothers cheered him up, kissing

and caressing him. And when he went up to bed, their hearts sank within them, and they all wept in their beds, even the Baron, who had till then restrained himself.

It was decided that at the next term the young man should be sent to the Havre college; and, during the whole summer, he was more spoilt than ever.

His mother often groaned at the idea of the separation. She prepared his outfit as if he was about to undertake a ten years' journey; then, one morning in October, after a sleepless night, the two women and the Baron got with him into the carriage, which was drawn by two horses.

They had made a previous journey and chosen his place in the dormitory and his place in class. Jeanne, helped by Aunt Lison, spent the whole day arranging his wearing apparel in the small chest of drawers. As it would not hold a quarter of what they had brought, she went to the head-master to get a second one. The purser was sent for; he suggested that so much linen and effects would only be a nuisance without ever being any use; and he refused, appealing to the regulation, to allow a second chest of drawers. The unhappy mother then resolved to hire a room in a small neighbouring hotel, bidding the hotel-keeper to go himself and bring Poulet whatever he might want, as soon as the boy asked for it.

Afterwards they strolled on the jetty to look at the ships entering and departing.

Gloomy evening fell on the town, which was gradually lit up. They went into a restaurant for dinner. None of them were hungry; and they

looked at each other with wet eyes whilst the dishes passed before them and returned almost untouched.

Then they began walking slowly towards the college. Children of all sizes were coming from every side, brought by their relations or by servants. A good many were crying. A sound of crying could be heard in the big courtyard, which was hardly lit up.

Jeanne and Poulet embraced a long time. Aunt Lison remained behind, quite forgotten, with her face in her handkerchief. But the Baron, who was giving way, shortened the adieux by taking his daughter away. The carriage was waiting before the gate; all three got in and returned in the night towards Les Peuples.

A deep sob was sometimes heard in the darkness.

Next day Jeanne cried till the evening. The next day she had the phaeton out and went off to Havre. Poulet seemed to have already got over the parting. For the first time in his life he had companions; and the longing to play made him fidget on his chair in the parlour.

Jeanne went to see him every other day, as well as on Sundays when the boys went out. Not knowing what to do during the classes, between the recreation-times, she remained sitting in the parlour, having neither the strength nor the courage to go away from the college. The headmaster sent to ask her to come up to his room, and he required of her to come less often. She paid no heed to this suggestion.

He then informed her that, if she went on preventing her son from playing during the recreation-hours, as well as from working, by continually

interrupting him, he would find himself compelled to give him back to her charge; and the Baron had notice of it. So she was kept in sight at Les Peuples, like a prisoner.

She looked forward to every vacation with more anxiety than her child.

And her soul was disturbed by an incessant restlessness. She started roving about the country, walking whole days alone with the dog Massacre, dreaming emptily. At times she remained sitting for a whole afternoon, looking at the sea from the top of the cliff; at others, she went down to Yport through the wood, going again over old walks whose memories haunted her. How far away, how far away, was the time when she walked over this same country, a young girl, intoxicated with dreams!

Every time she saw her son, it seemed to her they had been separated for ten years. He was becoming more of a man from month to month; from month to month she was becoming an old woman. Her father appeared to be her brother, and Aunt Lison, who did not grow older—she had remained faded from the age of twenty-five—had the look of an elder sister.

Poulet did not work much; he was two years in the fourth form. The third he muddled through somehow; but he had two years in the second; and was in the rhetoric class when he reached twenty.

He had become a tall, fair young man, with tufts of whiskers and a suggestion of moustaches. It was he now who came to Les Peuples every Sunday. As he had been taking riding-lessons for a

long time, he simply hired a horse and did the journey in two hours.

In the morning Jeanne started to meet him with the aunt and the Baron, who was gradually getting bent, and walked like a little old man, his hands joined behind his back as if to prevent him from falling on his nose.

They went quite quietly along the road, sitting sometimes by the way, and looking far ahead to see if they could not catch sight of the horseman. As soon as he appeared, like a black point on the white line of road, the three parents waved their handkerchiefs; and he would set his horse at a gallop, so as to come up like a whirlwind, which made Jeanne and Lison tremble with fear, whilst the grandfather cried enthusiastically: "Bravo!" in the admiration of impotence.

Although Paul was a head higher than his mother, she always treated him as a child, and still asked him: "Are your feet cold, Poulet?" And, when he strolled in front of the château after lunch, smoking a cigarette, she would open the window and cry to him: "Don't go out bare-headed, please, you'll catch a cold in the head."

And she shivered with anxiety when he rode off at night:

"Whatever you do, don't go too fast, my little Poulet; be careful, think of your poor mother, who would be in despair if anything happened to you."

Well, one Saturday morning she received a letter from Paul saying he would not come next day because some friends of his had got up a pleasure-trip to which he had been invited.

She was tortured with anguish during the whole Sunday, as if threatened with some calamity; then, on the Thursday, not being able to stand it any longer, she set off for Havre.

He seemed to her changed, though she could not say in what respect. He seemed lively, spoke in a more masculine voice. And suddenly he said, as if it were a quite obvious thing:

"Do you know, mamma, as you have come here, I shall not go to Les Peuples next Sunday, as we are going on another trip."

She was quite taken aback, dazed, as if he had declared he was about to start for the New World; presently, when she was at last able to speak:

"Oh! Poulet, what is the matter with you? tell me what is happening."

He began laughing and kissed her.

"But nothing whatever, mamma. I am going to amuse myself with my friends; everyone does at my age."

She found nothing to say in reply, and, when she was all alone in the carriage, curious ideas came upon her. She had no longer known him as her Poulet, her little Poulet of former days. For the first time she noticed he was grown-up, that he no longer belonged to her, that he was going to live his own life, without bothering about the old people. It seemed to her he had been transformed in one day. What! was that strong, bearded youth, whose will was strengthening, her own her poor little child, who made her once cultivate his salad-plants?

And for three months Paul only came to visit his parents from time to time, always pursued by

an evident desire to go away again as soon as possible, trying every evening to dock an hour off. Jeanne grew frightened, and the Baron always comforted her by reiterating: "Leave him alone: why, the boy is twenty."

However, one morning, an old man, shabbily dressed, asked in German-French for "Madame la Vicomtesse." And, after many ceremonious bows, he took out of his pocket a dirty note-book, saying: "I have a little paper for you"; and he unfolded and handed her a piece of greasy paper. She read it, re-read it, looked at the Jew, read it again, and inquired: "What does it mean?"

"I shall tell you," explained the man obsequiously. "Your son wanted a little money, and as I knew you are a good mother, I lent him a bit to tide him over."

She trembled.

"But why did he not ask me for it?"

The Jew explained at length that it was a matter of a gambling debt which had to be paid next day before noon, that, Paul not being yet of age, no one would have lent him any money, and that his "honour would have been compromised" had he not himself been able to render the young man the "little service."

Jeanne wanted to call in the Baron, but she could not get up, she was so paralyzed by emotion. At last she said to the money-lender:

"Would you be so kind as to ring the bell?"

He hesitated, fearing some trickery.

"If I inconvenience you, I will come again," he stuttered.

She shook her head. He rang; and they waited dumbly, opposite each other.

When the Baron arrived, he at once understood the position. The bill was for fifteen hundred francs. He paid a thousand, telling the man determinedly: "Take care you don't come again." The man thanked him, bowed, and vanished.

The grandfather and the mother went off to Havre at once; but, on reaching the college, they learnt that Paul had not been there for a month. The principal had received four letters signed by Jeanne, informing him that his pupil was ill, and then giving him news of his condition. Each letter was accompanied by a doctor's certificate: it was all a forgery, of course. They were thunderstruck, and stood there, looking at each other.

The principal, who was grieved for them, took them to the police commissary. They slept at an hotel.

Next day the young man was discovered at the house of a kept woman of the town. His grandfather and his mother took him away to Les Peuples, without a word being exchanged during the whole journey. Jeanne wept, with her face in her handkerchief. Paul gazed at the landscape with an air of indifference.

It was found out in a week that during the last three months he had contracted debts to the extent of fifteen thousand francs. The creditors had not put in an appearance at first, knowing that he would soon be of age.

No explanation took place. They wanted to win him back by kindness. They gave him choice dishes to eat, he was caressed, he was pampered. It was spring time; they hired a boat for him at Yport, in spite of Jeanne's fears, that he might make excursions on the sea when he liked.

He was not allowed a horse, lest he should go to Havre.

He was idle, irritable, brutal sometimes. The Baron was anxious about his neglected studies. Jeanne, frantic at the idea of separation, nevertheless asked herself what was going to be done with him.

One evening he did not come back. They heard he had gone in a boat with two sailors. His distracted mother went bareheaded down to Yport in the dark. A few men were waiting on the beach for the return of the boat.

A small light appeared in the offing; swaying about, it came nearer. Paul was not now on board. He had told the men to take him to Havre.

It was no good the police looking for him; they did not find him. The girl, who had hidden him in the first instance, had also disappeared, without leaving any traces, after selling her furniture and paying her rent. In Paul's room at Les Peuples two of the creature's letters were discovered, who appeared to be mad with love for him. She spoke about a trip to England, and said she had got the needful funds.

And the three inhabitants of the château lived silent and gloomy, in the dreary hell of moral torture. Jeanne's hair, which was already grey, had become white. She asked herself naïvely why fate was striking her such blows?

She received a letter from the Abbé Tolbiac.

"Madame, God's hand has weighed heavily on you. You refused Him your child; He has taken him from you in His turn and thrown him to a prostitute. Will you not open your eyes to this

teaching from Heaven? The Lord's pity is infinite. Perhaps He will forgive you, if you come back and kneel before Him. I am His humble servant; I will open the door of His dwelling to you when you come and knock."

She remained for a long time with this letter on her knees. Perhaps what the priest said was true. And all kinds of religious doubts began to tear her conscience. Could God be vindictive and jealous like men? Well, if He did not prove Himself jealous, nobody would fear Him, nobody would worship Him. In order to make Himself better known to us, He, no doubt, manifested Himself to men with their own feelings. And when the cowardly doubt, which urges into the churches those who hesitate, those who are troubled, entered into her, she secretly ran one evening, as night was falling, to the presbytery, and, kneeling at the feet of the lean Abbé, she asked for absolution.

He promised her a half-pardon, as God could not pour all His graces on a roof which sheltered a man like the Baron:

"You will soon feel," he affirmed, "the effects of the Divine clemency."

Two days later, she did actually receive a letter from her son, and she regarded it, in the frenzy of her grief, as the beginning of the consolation promised by the Abbé.

"My dear Mamma,

"Don't be anxious. I am at London, in good health, but I am greatly in need of money. We have not got a *sou* left, and we don't eat every day. The lady who accompanies me, and

whom I love with all my soul, has spent all she had, so as not to leave me—five thousand francs; and you will understand that I am bound in honour to return her this sum first of all. It would, therefore, be very kind of you to advance me fifteen thousand francs on what I inherit from papa, as I shall soon be of age; you would relieve me from a great embarrassment.

"Good-bye, my dear mamma; I kiss you with my whole heart, as well as grandpa and Aunt Lison. I hope to see you again soon.

"Your son,

"Vicomte Paul de Lamare."

He had written to her! So he did not forget her. She did not think about his asking for money. It would be sent him as he had not got any more. What did money matter? He had written to her!

And she ran, crying, to take the letter to the Baron. Aunt Lison was called, and they read, word by word, this piece of paper that spoke of him. They discussed every phrase of it.

Jeanne, jumping from utter despair to a kind of intoxication of hope, defended Paul:

"He will come back; he is going to come back, since he has written."

"That's all the same," observed the Baron, who was calmer. "He left us for this creature; so he loves her better than us, as he did not hesitate."

A sudden, dreadful pain pierced Jeanne's heart, and all at once a hatred sprang up in her against the mistress who was stealing her son from her; an implacable, savage hate, the hate of a jealous

mother. Up till then, all her thoughts had been for Paul. She had scarcely thought that this creature was the cause of his going astray. But the Baron's reflection had suddenly evoked the rival, had revealed to her her fatal power; and she felt that between this woman and herself a bitter struggle was beginning, and she felt likewise that she would rather lose her son than share him with the other woman.

And all her joy crumbled away.

They sent the fifteen thousand francs, and got no more news for five months.

Then a business man appeared to regulate the details of Julien's inheritance. Jeanne and the Baron gave him the accounts without discussion, giving up even the usufruct which belonged to the mother. So on returning to Paris, Paul possessed one hundred and twenty thousand francs. He afterwards wrote four letters in six months, giving news about himself in a curt style, and ending by cold protests of affection:

"I am working," he declared; "I have got a place on the Exchange. I hope to come and kiss you some day at Les Peuples, my dear relations."

He said not a word about his mistress, and that silence meant more than if he had talked about her for four pages. In his icy letters, Jeanne felt that woman in ambush, implacable, the eternal enemy of mothers, the loose woman.

The three lonely ones discussed what could be done to save Paul; and they found nothing. A journey to Paris? Of what use?

"We must let his passion wear itself out," re-

marked the Baron. "He will come back to us quite of his own accord."

And their life was sorrowful.

Jeanne and Lison used to go together to church, without the Baron's knowledge.

A rather long time passed without news, and then a desperate letter terrified them one morning.

"My poor Mamma,

"I am done for; I shall have to blow out my brains, if you do not come to my assistance. A speculation, in which I saw every chance of success, has just failed; and I owe eighty-five thousand francs. It means dishonour if I do not pay; ruin, the impossibility of doing anything thenceforward. I am done for. I repeat, I shall blow out my brains rather than survive the shame. I should perhaps have done so already, had it not been for the encouragements of a woman about whom I never speak to you, and who is my Providence.

"I kiss you from the bottom of my heart, my dear mamma; it is perhaps for ever. Good bye!

"Paul."

Enclosed in the letter were bundles of business papers that gave detailed explanation of the disaster.

The Baron answered by return of post that they were going to consider the matter. He then left for Havre in order to get information; and he mortgaged some estates in order to procure the money, which was sent to Paul.

The young man replied with three letters of en-

thusiastic thanks and passionate affection, and declared he would come immediately and embrace his dear relations.

He did not come.

A whole year went by.

Jeanne and the Baron were about to start for Paris in order to find him and try a last effort, when they learnt from a brief note that he was again in London, promoting a steamboat company under the name of "Paul Delamare and Co." He wrote

"It is a certain future for me, perhaps great wealth And I run no risk You see at once all the advantages When I see you again, I shall have a fine position in the world There is nothing to-day but trade for getting oneself out of embarrassing difficulties"

Three months later the steamboat company went bankrupt, and the manager was prosecuted for falsifying the trade-books Jeanne had a nerve-crisis that lasted several hours, then she took to bed.

The Baron again went to Havre, made inquiries, saw solicitors, business men, barristers, attorneys, found that the deficit of the Delamare Company was two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs, and again mortgaged his property. The château of Les Peuples and the two farms attached to it were burdened with a large sum

One evening, when he was settling the last formalities in an official's office, he fell on the floor in an apoplectic fit

Jeanne was informed by a mounted messenger. When she arrived, he was dead.

She brought him back to Les Peuples, so crushed that her grief was rather of the nature of a stunning than of despair.

The Abbé Tolbiac refused to let the body be brought into the church, in spite of the two women's frantic entreaties. The Baron was buried at nightfall, without any ceremony.

Paul knew what had happened, through one of the liquidators of his company. He was still hiding in England. He wrote to excuse himself for not having come, as he had heard of the unhappy event too late. "Besides, now that you have rescued me from my difficulties, my dear mamma, I shall return to France, and shall soon embrace you."

Jeanne was living in such a dazed condition that she no longer seemed to understand anything.

And towards the end of the winter Aunt Lison, who was then sixty-eight, had an attack of bronchitis which turned into inflammation of the lungs; and she quietly expired, murmuring:

"My poor little Jeanne, I am going to ask the good God to have pity on you."

Jeanne followed her to the cemetery, saw the earth fall on the coffin, and, as she was swooning away, with a longing for death at her heart, for no more suffering, no more thought, a sturdy peasant-woman seized her in her arms and carried her off as if she were a little child.

On coming back to the château, Jeanne, who had just spent five nights at the old spinster's bedside, let herself be put to bed without resistance by this unknown peasant, who handled her with gentleness and firmness; and she fell into a sleep of exhaustion, overwhelmed by fatigue and suffering.

She awoke about midnight. A night-light was burning on the chimney-piece. A woman was sleeping in an arm-chair. Who was she? She did not recognize her, and, leaning on the edge of the bed, she tried to get a clear look at her features, by the flickering gleam of the wick floating on oil in a kitchen-glass.

Still, it seemed to her she had seen that face before. But when? where? The woman was sleeping quietly, her head bent on her shoulder, whilst her cap lay on the ground. She might be forty or forty-five. She was strong, sun-burnt, square-built, powerful Her big hands hung on each side of the chair. Her hair was turning grey Jeanne gazed at her fixedly, with the disturbed mind that accompanies the awakening after the feverish slumber that follows great misfortunes. She had certainly seen that face! Was it in former years? Was it recently? She did not know, and she was agitated and excited by the obsession of it. She got up softly, to look more closely at the sleeper, and approached on tip-toe. It was the woman who had taken her up at the cemetery, and then put her to bed. That she vaguely recalled.

But had she met her elsewhere, at another period of her life? Or did she merely fancy she recognized her in the obscure recollection of the previous day? And, then, how came she there, in her room? Why?

The woman raised her eyelids, perceived Jeanne, and started up abruptly. They stood face to face, so near that their breasts touched.

"What! you up!" grumbled the unknown.

"You'll get some illness at this hour. Please go to bed again!"

"Who are you?" asked Jeanne.

The woman, however, opening her arms, seized hold of her, took her up again, and brought her back on to the bed with a man's strength And as she placed her gently on the sheets, leaning, almost lying, on Jeanne, she began crying, kissing her wildly on her cheeks, in her hair, on her eyes, drenching her face with her tears, and murmuring:

"My poor mistress, Mam'zelle Jeanne, my poor mistress, don't you recognize me then?"

And Jeanne exclaimed "Rosalie, my girl" And, throwing her arms round her neck, she embraced and kissed her, and they both sobbed, clasped closely together, mingling their tears, unable to separate their arms

Rosalie was the first to cool down.

"Come, you must be wise," she said, "and not catch cold." And she got together the bed-clothes, tucked up the bed, replaced the pillow under her old mistress's head, who continued to choke with fretting, quivering with the old memories that had risen up in her soul

"How did you come back, my poor girl?" she at length inquired

"Well! was I going to leave you all alone like that, now?"

"Light a candle that I may see you," rejoined Jeanne. And, when the light had been placed on the night-table, they looked at one another a long time without saying a word. Then Jeanne, stretching out her hand to her old servant, whispered:

"I should never have recognized you, my girl; you are much altered, you know, but certainly not as much as I am."

And Rosalie, gazing at this white-haired woman, thin and faded, whom she had left young, beautiful and fresh, replied:

"Yes, it's true you've altered, Madame Jeanne, and more than you should be. But remember, too, that it's twenty-four years since we saw each other."

They were silent, reflecting again. Jeanne at last inquired nervously: "Are you happy, at least?"

And Rosalie, hesitating in the fear of awakening some painful memory, stammered out:

"Well—yes—yes—Madame. I haven't much to complain of, I have been happier than you—that's sure. There's only one thing that always depressed me, that is, that I didn't remain here——" Here she suddenly broke off, flurried at having touched on the subject without intending it.

But Jeanne replied gently: "Well, my girl, we don't always do what we want. You are also a widow, are you not?" Then a pang of anguish caused her voice to tremble, and she went on: "Have you other—other children?"

"No, Madame."

"And he—your—your son—what's become of him? Are you content with him?"

"Yes, Madame. He's a good fellow, who works hard. He married six months ago, and he will take my farm now that I've come back to you."

"Then you won't leave me again, my girl?" whispered Jeanne, trembling with emotion.

"You may be certain," remarked Rosalie abruptly, "I've arranged about that."

Then they spoke no more for some time.

Jeanne, in spite of herself, again began comparing their lives, but without bitterness at heart, resigned now to the unjust cruelties of fate.

"How did your husband behave to you?" she observed.

"Oh! he was a good fellow, Madame, and no idler; he was able to save up some property. He died of consumption"

Whereupon Jeanne, sitting on her bed, was seized by a longing to know all about them.

"Now, tell me everything, my girl, your whole life. That'll do me good to-day."

And Rosalie, drawing up a chair, sat down and began speaking about herself, her house, her friends, entering into the little details dear to country people, describing her court-yard, laughing sometimes at incidents already old that recalled to her happy moments in the past, raising her voice gradually like a farmer's wife accustomed to order about

"Oh! I've got property now," she at last declared. "I'm not afraid of anything." Then she became confused again, and went on in a lower tone: "But I owe it all to you; so you know I don't want any wages. No! No! And if you don't agree to it, I'm off."

"But you don't intend to serve me for nothing?" remarked Jeanne.

"Yes, yes, Madame. Money! you give me money! Why, I've almost as much as you. D'you know what you have left with all your scrawls

about mortgages and loans, and interest which has not been paid and goes on increasing? Do you know? No; eh? Well, I promise you, you haven't now even ten thousand livres income. Not ten thousand, believe me. But I'm going to settle all that, and quickly too."

She had begun to speak loud again, growing angry, indignant over the neglected interest, the threatening ruin. And when a slight, affectionate smile passed over her mistress's face, she cried, outraged:

"You mustn't laugh at that, Madame, because without money people are looked on as worthless."

Jeanne again took her hands and held them in hers; then she observed slowly, always pursued by the thought that haunted her.

"Oh! I! I have had no luck. Everything has turned out badly for me Fate has cruelly treated my life."

Rosalie, however, shook her head.

"You mustn't say that, Madame, you mustn't say that. You were badly married, that's all. One oughtn't to marry like that, without even knowing one's *fiancé*"

And they went on talking about themselves, as if they were two old friends.

When sunrise came, they were still chatting.

CHAPTER XII

In a week, Rosalie had completely taken over the management of the things and people belonging to the château. Jeanne was resigned, and passively acquiesced. Weak as she was, she dragged her legs after her as formerly her mother did, and went out, leaning on the arm of the servant, who slowly walked her up and down, scolded her, comforted her with abrupt, tender words, treating her like a sick child.

They were always talking of the olden times, Jeanne with tears in her eyes, Rosalie with the calm tone of the impassive peasant. The old servant several times dwelt upon the question of the interest owing; then she asked that the papers should be handed over to her, which Jeanne, altogether ignorant of business, was hiding from her out of shame for her son.

Thereupon, Rosalie travelled to Fécamp every day for a week, in order to have things explained to her by a notary she knew.

Presently, one evening, after putting her mistress to bed, she sat down by the bedside, and said abruptly:

"Now that you're lying down, Madame, we're going to have a talk."

And she explained the situation.

When everything was settled up, about seven to eight thousand francs per annum would be left. No more.

"Well, my girl," answered Jeanne, "I feel I certainly shan't make old bones. I shall have quite enough."

But Rosalie was annoyed. "You, Madame, perhaps; but aren't you going to leave anything to M. Paul?"

Jeanne shuddered. "I beg you never to talk to me about him. I suffer too much when I think of him."

"On the contrary, I want to speak to you about him, because you don't look facts in the face, you see, Madame Jeanne. He is making a fool of himself; well, he won't always go on doing so; and then he will marry; he will have children. He'll want money to bring them up. Now listen to me; you must sell Les Peuples!"

Jeanne started, and sat up in bed: "Sell Les Peuples! What are you thinking of? No, never, never!"

But Rosalie was not disturbed. "I tell you, you must sell it—I, Madame, because it is necessary."

And she explained her calculations, her plans, and her reasonings.

When once Les Peuples and the two farms attached to it had been sold to a fancier she had found, four farms at Saint-Léonard would be retained, which, freed from all mortgage, would bring in an income of eight thousand three hundred francs. Thirteen hundred francs a year would be put aside for repairs and the upkeep of the property; so there would remain seven thousand

francs, five thousand of which would be taken for yearly expenses, and two thousand would be reserved as a fund in case of need.

"All the rest is gone; it's eaten up," she added. "And, besides, I'm going to keep the key, you understand; and as for M Paul, he won't have any more, not a thing; he would take your last *sou*."

Jeanne, who was crying quietly, murmured:

"But if he has nothing to eat?"

"Well, he'll come and eat with us, if he's hungry. There'll always be a bed and food for him. D'you imagine he'd have made such a fool of himself, if you'd left him without a *sou* at the beginning?"

"But he had debts, he would have been dishonoured"

"Would it prevent him from making debts, if you had no money yourself? You paid—well and good; but you're not going to pay any more—I tell you so. Now, good night, Madame."

And she went off.

Jeanne did not sleep; she was upset at the notion of selling Les Peuples, of going away, of leaving the house to which her whole life was bound.

When she saw Rosalie entering her room next day, she remarked: "My poor girl, I shall never make up my mind to leave here."

The servant, however, was annoyed: "It's got to be, all the same, Madame. The notary will be here soon, with the man who wants the château. Otherwise you won't have a blade of grass in four years' time."

Jeanne was crushed, saying over and over again: "I can't, I can't."

An hour later, the postman handed her a letter from Paul, who asked for ten thousand francs more. What was she to do? In her distractedness, she consulted Rosalie, who raised her arms:

"What did I tell you, Madame? Ah! you two would have made a nice mess of it, if I hadn't come!"

And Jeanne, submitting to her servant's will, replied to the young man:

"My dear Son,

"I have no more for you. You have ruined me; I see myself even compelled to sell Les Peuples. But don't forget that I shall always have a shelter for you, when you want to take refuge with your old mother, whom you have caused much suffering.

"Jeanne."

And when the notary arrived with M. Jeoffrin, a retired sugar-refiner, she received them herself, and invited them to look at everything in detail.

A month later she signed the contract of sale, and bought at the same time a small middle-class house situated near Goderville, on the Montivilliers high-road, in the village of Batteville.

Then she walked till night quite alone in her mother's alley, her heart torn asunder and her mind in anguish, bidding despairing, sobbing farewells to the horizon, the trees, the worm-eaten bench under the plane, to all those things she knew so well that they seemed to have entered into her eyes and into her soul; to the coppice, to the slope in front of the common where she had so often

sat, whence she had seen the Comte de Fourville rushing towards the sea on that terrible day when Julien died, to an old headless elm against which she often used to lean, to all that familiar garden.

Rosalie came and took her by the arm, to compel her to come in.

A tall peasant of twenty-five was waiting at the door. He greeted her in a friendly tone, as if he had known her a long time.

"Good-day, Madame Jeanne, how are you? My mother told me to come for the moving. I should like to know what you're going to take with you, so that I can do it from time to time without spoiling farm work"

It was her servant's son—Julien's son—Paul's brother.

Her heart seemed to stop beating; and yet she would have liked to kiss the fellow.

She looked at him, to see if he resembled her husband or her son. He was red, vigorous, with the light hair and blue eyes of his mother. And still he resembled Julien. In what? by what? She could not tell, but he had something of him in the general aspect of his physiognomy.

"If you could show it me at once," went on the young man, "I should be obliged."

But she did not yet know what she would decide to take, as her new house was very small, and she begged him to return at the end of the week.

Then her moving pre-occupied her, bringing a gloomy distraction into her dull, hopeless life.

She went from room to room, seeking the furniture which recalled episodes to her; that friendly furniture which becomes a part of our lives, almost

of our being, which we have known since youth, and to which are attached memories of joys or of sorrows; dates in our history, which have been the dumb companions of our sweet or bitter hours, which have grown old, have been worn out beside us, whose stuff is holy in places, with the covering torn, whose joints are giving way, whose colour has faded.

She selected them one by one, often hesitating, disturbed as if she were taking resolutions of importance, reconsidering her decision every moment, comparing the merits of two arm-chairs, or some old writing-desk with an old work-table.

She opened the drawers, tried to recall some incidents; then, when she had at last said to herself: "Yes, I shall take that," the thing was taken down to the dining-room.

She wanted to keep all the furniture of her room, her bed, the tapestry, the clock, everything.

She took some drawing-room chairs, those whose designs she had liked from her earliest childhood: the fox and the stork, the fox and the crow, the grasshopper and the ant, and the melancholy heron.

Then, one day, as she was prowling about all the corners of the house she was about to leave, she went up into the garret.

She was filled with astonishment; it was a lumber-room of objects of all kinds, some broken, some merely dirty, others which had been put there for some reason or other, because they were not pleasing, because they had been replaced. She perceived numbers of odds and ends which she had formerly seen, and which had suddenly vanished

without her noticing it; trifles she had had in her hands, little, old, insignificant objects which she had had fifteen years, which she had seen every day without noticing them, and which, all of a sudden, when she re-discovered them there in that garret, by the side of others older still, whose places she perfectly remembered in the first time of her arrival, assumed a sudden importance as forgotten witnesses, re-discovered friends. They produced on her the impression of people one has known a long time without their ever having revealed themselves, who suddenly, one evening, apropos of nothing in particular, begin chattering without stopping, relating their whole soul and things of which one had no suspicion

She went from one to the other, her heart aching, as she said to herself: "Why, it was I who cracked this china cup one evening, a few days before my marriage.—Ah! here is my mother's little lantern, and the walking-stick papa broke as he was trying to open the gate, the wood of which was swollen by the rain."

There were also many things up there about which she knew nothing, which recalled nothing to her mind, which had come from her grandparents or her great-grandparents: those dusty things which appear to be exiled in a period that is not theirs, and which seem sad at their desertion, whose history and adventures nobody knows, as nobody has seen the people who chose, bought, possessed, loved them, and nobody has known the hands that touched them familiarly, and the eyes that looked upon them with pleasure.

Jeanne touched them, moved them about, leaving

her finger-marks in the accumulated dust; and there she remained amid those old things, in the dim light that fell through a few squares of glass in the roof.

She examined minutely some three-legged chairs trying to remember something about them, a copper warming-pan, a dented foot-warmer, which she believed she recognized, and a heap of worn-out household utensils.

She afterwards put what she wanted to take away into a heap, and, coming down, sent Rosalie for it. The servant indignantly refused to fetch down "that dirty lot" Jeanne, however, who had, in spite of this, no will of her own, was firm this time, and Rosalie had to obey.

One morning, the young farmer, Julien's son, Denis Lecoq, came with his cart to start the removing Rosalie accompanied him in order to see about the unloading, and to put the furniture in the positions they were intended to occupy.

Jeanne, being left alone, began to wander through the rooms of the château, seized by a frightful attack of despair, kissing, in her impulses of frantic love, everything she was unable to take with her—the big white birds of the drawing-room tapestry, the old candle-sticks, everything she came across. She went in her frenzy from one room to another, her eyes streaming with tears; then she went out to "say good bye" to the sea.

It was about the end of September; a low, grey sky seemed to weigh upon the world, the dreary, yellowish waves stretched to the horizon. She remained a long time standing on the cliff, revolv-

ing torturing fancies in her head. Then, when night fell, she returned, having suffered that day as much as she had during her greatest sorrows.

Rosalie had come back, and was awaiting her, enchanted with the new house, declaring it to be far more cheerful than that great box of a building which was not even by the side of a high-road.

Jeanne cried the whole evening.

From the time they knew the château was sold, the farmers showed her only just the amount of respect due, calling her amongst themselves "The mad woman," without knowing exactly why; no doubt because, with their brute instinct, they divined her morbid, increasing sentimentality, her frenzied dreams, all the disorder of her poor soul, shaken by misfortune.

On the day before her departure, she chanced to go into the stables. The noise of a growl made her start. It was Massacre, about whom she had hardly thought for months. Blind and paralyzed, he had reached an age to which such animals rarely attain, and was still vegetating on a straw bed, tended by Ludivine, who did not forget him. She took him in her arms, kissed him, and carried him into the house. Fat as a barrel, he could hardly drag himself along on his stiff legs, which were wide apart, and he barked like the wooden dogs children play with.

At length came the last day. Jeanne had slept in Julien's old room, as the furniture had been removed from her own.

She got out of bed, exhausted and panting, as

if she had run a long way. The vehicle containing the baggage and the rest of the furniture was already loaded in the court-yard. Another two-wheeled carriage was drawn up behind, which was to carry the mistress and the servant.

Old Simon and Ludivine were to remain alone till the new owner's arrival; then they were going to live with their relations, as Jeanne had given them a small pension. They had, besides, some savings. They were now very old servants, who could not be employed, and were continually chattering. Marius had married and left the house a long time before.

About eight, rain began to fall, a cold drizzle, which was driven by a light sea-wind. The cart had to be covered up. The leaves were already falling from the trees.

On the kitchen table were smoking cups of *café au lait*. Jeanne sat down to hers, and sipped at it; presently getting up, she cried: "Let us go."

She put on her hat and shawl, and whilst Rosalie was putting on her goloshes, she murmured, heart-broken: "Do you remember, my girl, how it rained when we left Rouen to come here?"——

She had a kind of spasm, laid her hands on her breast, and fell on her back, unconscious.

She remained as if dead for more than an hour; then she opened her eyes again, and she was seized with convulsions, accompanied by an outburst of weeping.

When she had calmed down a bit, she felt so weak she could not get up. But Rosalie, who was afraid of further fits if the departure was post-

poned, went and fetched her son. They seized hold of her, raised her up, carried her off, and laid her down in the carriage on the wooden seat covered with waxed cloth; and the old servant, sitting beside Jeanne, wrapt up her legs, covered her shoulders with a big cloak, then, holding an umbrella open over her head, she exclaimed: "Quick, Denis, let's go!"

The young man climbed up near his mother, and, sitting on one thigh only, for want of room, started his horse at a quick trot, which jolted the two women in their seats. When they turned the corner of the village, they saw some one walking up and down on the road; it was the Abbé Tolbiac, who seemed to be watching for their departure.

He stopped to let the carriage pass. In one hand he held up his cassock to keep it out of the water in the road, and his thin legs, clad in black stockings, ended in huge muddy boots.

Jeanne lowered her eyes so as not to meet his look; and Rosalie, who knew all about him, became furious. She muttered: "The beast! the beast!" then taking her son's hand, she cried: "Give him a cut with the whip."

But the young man, just as he was passing by the priest, suddenly let the wheel of the gig, driven at full speed, drop into a rut, and a great volume of mud, spurting out, covered the priest from head to foot.

And Rosalie, overjoyed, turned round to shake her fist at him, whilst the priest wiped himself with his big handkerchief.

They went on for five minutes, when Jeanne all at once exclaimed: "We've forgotten Massacre!"

They had to stop, and Denis, getting down, ran to fetch the dog, whilst Rosalie held the reins.

The young man at last re-appeared, carrying in his arms the big, shapeless, hairless animal, which he put down between the two women.

CHAPTER XIII

Two hours later the gig stopped before a small brick house, built in the middle of an orchard planted with pyramid-shaped pear-trees, on the border of the high-road.

Four lattice-work arbours, adorned with honeysuckle and clematis, formed the four corners of the garden, which was arranged in small beds for vegetables, which were separated from the fruit-trees by narrow paths

A very high quick-set hedge surrounded the property on every side, which was divided by a field from the neighbouring farm. A forge came before it, a hundred paces down the road The other nearest dwellings were a kilometre off.

The surrounding view extended over the plain of the Caux district, all studded with farms, which were engirt by the four double lines of big trees enclosing the pear-tree court-yard.

When Jeanne arrived, she at once wanted to lie down, but Rosalie did not allow her, fearing she would begin thinking again.

The carpenter from Goderville was there, come to put things straight; and they immediately began the arrangement of the furniture that was already there, whilst waiting for the last cart, which could not be long.

It was a considerable job, requiring long reflection and much reasoning.

Presently, in an hour's time, the cart appeared at the gate, and had to be unloaded in the rain.

When night fell, the house was in complete disorder, full of things piled up anyhow; and Jeanne, who was exhausted, went to sleep the moment she was in bed.

The following days she had no time to fret, so full was she of work She even took a certain pleasure in making her new house pretty, since she was continually haunted by the idea that her son would return to it. The hangings of her old room were put up in the dining-room, which served at the same time for a drawing-room; and she arranged with particular care one of the two rooms on the first floor, to which she gave in her thoughts the name of "Poulet's room."

She reserved the other room for herself, whilst Rosalie lived above, near the garret.

The little house was carefully arranged, and looked nice; and Jeanne was at first pleased with it, although something was wanting which she could not quite realize.

One morning, the clerk of the Fécamp notary brought her three thousand six hundred francs, the value of the furniture left at Les Peuples, estimated by an upholsterer. When she got the money, she had a thrill of pleasure; and, as soon as the man had gone, she hastened to put on her hat, wishing to get to Goderville as soon as possible to despatch this unlooked-for sum to Paul.

As, however, she was hurrying along on the high-road, she met Rosalie, as she was returning

from market. The servant had a suspicion, but did not guess the truth at once; then, when she had found out, for Jeanne could not hide anything from her, she put her basket on the ground, and gave vent to her annoyance at her ease.

And she shouted out, with her hands on her hips; then she took hold of her mistress with her right arm, held her basket with her left, and began walking again towards the house, without ceasing from her anger.

When they had come back, the servant asked for the money to be given her. Jeanne gave it up, but kept six hundred francs; her trick, however, was quickly detected by the servant, who had become distrustful; and she had to give her up everything.

Still, Rosalie agreed that the remainder might be sent to the young man.

After a few days he wrote his thanks. "You have done me a great service, my dear mamma, for we were in dreadful straits."

Yet Jeanne hardly got accustomed to Batteville; it always seemed to her that she could not breathe there as she once did, that she was still more lonely, more deserted, more lost. She would go out for a walk, reach the village of Verneuil, returning by the Trois-Mares, and then, as soon as she had come in, she would get up, overcome by a longing to go out again as if she had actually forgotten to go to the place where she ought to go, where she longed to walk.

And that happened every day, without her understanding the reason of this strange need. One evening, however, a phrase came to her uncon-

sciously that revealed to her the secret of her restlessness. As she was sitting down to dinner, she said: "Oh! how I long to see the sea!"

What she so strongly yearned for was the sea, her great neighbour for twenty-five years; the sea with its salt air, its fits of anger, its grumbling voice, its powerful breath, the sea which she saw every morning from her window at Les Peuples, which she breathed in day and night, which she felt near her, which she had begun to love like a human being, without suspecting it.

Massacre, too, was living in a very perturbed condition. From the evening of his arrival, he had installed himself at the bottom of the kitchen-dresser, and it was impossible to dislodge him. He remained there all day, almost motionless, merely turning over from time to time with a dull grunt.

But, as soon as night came, he got up and dragged himself to the garden door, falling against the wall. Then, when he had spent the few necessary minutes outside, he came back, sat down before the stove that was still hot, and, as soon as his two mistresses had gone to bed, began to howl.

He howled like that all night, in a piteous, grief-stricken tone, sometimes stopping for an hour, to resume in still more heart-rending accents. He was tied up in front of the house in a barrel. He howled beneath the windows. Presently, as he was feeble and very near dying, he was taken back to the kitchen.

Sleep became impossible to Jeanne, who heard the old animal incessantly moaning and scratching, trying to find his way about this new house, under-

standing clearly that he was not in his old home.

Nothing would quiet him. He dozed all day long, as if his dim eyes, the consciousness of his infirmity, prevented him from moving at times when all living things live and move; but as soon as night fell, he began restlessly to prowl about, as if he no longer dared live and move except in the dark, which makes all beings blind.

He was found dead one morning. It was a great relief.

Winter was coming on, and Jeanne felt overwhelmed by unconquerable despair. It was not one of those keen pains that seem to make the soul writhe, but a dreary, mournful sadness.

There was no distraction to arouse her. Nobody bothered about her. The high-road that stretched to the right and left of her door was almost always empty. Now and then a tilbury passed at a trot, driven by a red-faced man, whose blouse, swollen by the rushing wind, looked like a kind of blue balloon; sometimes it was a slow cart, or perchance she saw approaching from afar two peasants, a man and a woman, who were quite small on the horizon, then growing larger and larger, and, when they had passed the house, diminishing again, becoming no larger than two insects, at last there, right at the end of the white line that stretched as far as the eye could see, going up or down, according to the gentle undulations of the ground.

When the grass began to grow again, a little girl in short skirts passed every morning before the gate, leading two thin cows which browsed along

the ditches of the road. She returned in the evening, in the same sleepy way, advancing behind the animals one step every ten minutes.

Jeanne dreamt, every night, she was still living at Les Peuples.

She was there, as in the olden times, with papa and mamma, and sometimes even with Aunt Lison. She did over again things forgotten and ended, imagined she was supporting Madame Adélaïde as she journeyed up and down her avenue. And each awakening was followed by tears.

She was always thinking of Paul, asking herself: "What is he doing? How is he now? Does he sometimes think of me?" As she walked slowly along the deep-lying roads between the farms, she would revolve in her head all these ideas that tortured her; but her greatest suffering arose from an implacable jealousy of the unknown woman who had ravished her son from her. That hatred alone kept her back, hindered her from acting, from going to look for him, from visiting his abode. She seemed to see his mistress standing on the threshold and asking: "What d'you want here, Madame?" Her mother's pride revolted at the possibility of such an experience; and the lofty pride of a woman who had always been chaste, without a weakness or a stain, exasperated her more and more against all those cowardices of a man who was enslaved by the vile practices of carnal love which makes the heart itself dastardly. Humanity seemed to her unclean when she thought of all the vile secrets of the senses, of the caresses that degrade, of all the divined mysteries of indissoluble unions.

Spring and summer again went by.

But when autumn returned, with its prolonged showers, its greyish sky, its sombre clouds, such a weariness of living as she did, overcame her, that she resolved to make a great effort to get back her Poulet.

The young man's passion must be exhausted by this time.

She wrote him a piteous letter.

"My dear Child,

"I am coming to beg you to return to me. Remember that I am old and ill, quite alone the whole year, with a servant. I am now living in a little house near the high-road. It is very dreary. But if you were there, everything would be different for me. I have only you in the world, and I haven't seen you for seven years! You will never know how unhappy I have been, and how much I have rested my heart on you. You were my life, my dream, my only hope, my only love, and you fail me, and you have deserted me!

"Oh! come back, my little Poulet, come back and kiss me, come back to your old mother, who is stretching out to you despairing arms.

"Jeanne."

He answered a few days later.

"My dear Mamma,

"I should like nothing better than to come and see you, but I haven't a ha'penny. Send me some money and I shall come. I intended, besides, to come and see you, to talk to you about a scheme, which would enable me to do what you ask.

"The disinterested affection of the lady, who has been my companion in the bad times I am going through, is boundless so far as I am concerned. It is impossible for me to defer any longer a public recognition of her faithful love and devotion. She has, moreover, very good manners, which you will be able to appreciate. And she is very well educated, she reads a great deal. In fact, you have no idea what she has always been for me. I should be a brute, if I did not show her my gratitude. So I now ask your leave to marry her. You would forgive my escapades, and we should all live together in your new house.

"If you knew her, you would grant me permission at once. I assure you she is perfect, and very distinguished You would like her, I'm sure. As for me, I could not live without her.

"I am awaiting your reply with impatience, my dear mamma, and we embrace you with all our hearts.

"Your son,

"VICOMTE PAUL DE LAMARE."

It was a knock-down blow for Jeanne. She did not stir; the letter lay on her knees; she saw through the stratagem of the woman who had always kept her son at her side, who had not allowed him to come once, biding her time, the time when the despairing old mother, unable to resist any longer the desire to clasp her child in her arms, would weaken, would grant everything.

And her heart was torn with bitter grief at Paul's persistent preference for this creature. "He does not love me. He does not love me," she repeated.

Rosalie came in. "He wants to marry her now," Jeanne gasped out.

The servant started. "Oh! Madame, you will not allow that. M. Paul mustn't pick up that trull."

And Jeanne, who was overwhelmed, but nevertheless disgusted, rejoined:

"Never that, my girl. And, since he doesn't want to come, I am going to find him myself, and we shall see which of us two will conquer."

And she wrote at once to Paul to say that she was coming, and would see him somewhere else than in the house in which that vile woman lived.

Then, whilst awaiting a reply, she made her preparations. Rosalie began to pack her mistress's linen and effects into an old box. But, as she was folding a dress, an old country dress, she exclaimed:

"You have really nothing fit to put on. I shan't allow you to go like that. You would be a disgrace to every one, and the Paris ladies would look upon you as a servant."

Jeanne let her do as she pleased. And the two women went together to Goderville and chose some stuff with green checks, which was entrusted to the dressmaker of the town. They afterward went to the notary, M. Roussel, who went every year for a fortnight's trip to the capital, in order to get some information. For Jeanne had not seen Paris for twenty-eight years.

He made numerous recommendations about the way to avoid being run over, and being robbed, advising her to sew her money up in the lining of

her dress, and only to keep in her pocket what was indispensable; he dilated at length on the moderate-priced restaurants, two or three of which he mentioned as being frequented by ladies, and he spoke of the Hôtel de Normandie, where he used to put up himself, near the railway station. She might mention his name as an introduction.

During the last six years, there had been one of those railways between Paris and Havre, about which every one talked. Jeanne, however, bowed down by sorrow, had not yet seen these steam-engines, which were revolutionizing the whole country.

Meanwhile Paul did not answer.

She waited a week, then a fortnight, going every morning on the high-road to meet the postman, whom she asked, trembling:

"Have you anything for me, Malandain?"

And the man always replied in a voice hoarsened by the vicissitudes of the seasons:

"Nothing this time either, my good lady."

It was, of course, that woman who prevented Paul from replying!

Jeanne then resolved to set off at once. She wanted to take Rosalie with her, but the servant refused to go, so as not to increase the expenses of the journey.

Further, she did not allow her mistress to take more than three hundred francs:

"If you want more, you will write, and I shall go to the notary and get him to send it you. If I give you more, M. Paul will pocket it all."

And, on one December morning, they got into the gig of Denis Lecoq, who came to fetch them,

to take them to the station, because Rosalie was accompanying her mistress as far as that.

They first found out about the price of the tickets, and then, when all was settled and the luggage registered, they waited in front of those iron lines, trying to understand how the thing worked, so wrapt up in the mystery that they no longer thought about the sad reasons for the journey.

At last, a distant whistling made them turn their heads, and they perceived a black machine which grew bigger and bigger. It came up with a fearful noise, and passed before them, dragging after it a long chain of little moving houses; and, a porter having opened a door, Jeanne tearfully kissed Rosalie, and stepped into one of these huts.

"*Au revoir*, Madame," cried Rosalie, with emotion. "A pleasant journey, and come back soon!'

"*Au revoir*, my girl!"

There was again a whistle, and the whole string of carriages began to move, slowly at first, then more quickly, then with frightful rapidity.

In Jeanne's compartment, two gentlemen were asleep in the corners.

She looked at the fields, trees, farms, villages flying by, terrified at the speed, feeling herself involved in a new life, carried off to a new world which was not her own, not that of her quiet youth and uneventful life.

Evening was at hand, when the train reached Paris.

A porter took Jeanne's trunk; and she followed him, frightened, hustled about, unskilful at passing

through the moving crowd, almost running behind the man, in fear of losing sight of him.

"I am recommended to you by M. Roussel," she hastened to declare, when she was in the hotel office.

"Who's M Roussel?" asked the proprietress, a huge, solemn woman, who was sitting at her desk

"Why, the Goderville notary, who stops with you every year," replied Jeanne, surprised.

"That may be," returned the stout lady. "I don't know him Do you want a room?"

"Yes, Madame"

And a porter, taking her luggage, went up the staircase in front of her

She felt depressed She sat at a little table, and asked for a soup and a wing of chicken to be sent up She had taken nothing since daybreak

She had a melancholy meal by the light of a candle, thinking over numberless things, remembering her journey through this same town on her return from the honeymoon, and the first signs of Julien's true character, that appeared at the time of their stay in Paris But she was young then, and trusting, and courageous Now she felt old, worried, timid even, weak and troubled about a mere nothing. When she had finished her meal, she sat at the window, and looked down at the street full of people She wanted to go out, and did not dare to. She would infallibly lose herself, she thought. She went to bed, and blew out the light.

But she was kept awake by the noise, the sensation produced by an unknown town, and the bother of the journey. The hours slipped by. The noise

outside gradually dwindled; yet she was unable to sleep, disturbed by the half-repose of a great city. She was accustomed to that calm, deep slumber of the country, which benumbs everything, men, beasts and plants; and she now felt around her a mysterious agitation. Some voices, which were almost inaudible, reached her as if they had glided through the hotel walls Sometimes a plank creaked, a door shut, a bell rang

Suddenly, about two in the morning, when she was beginning to doze off, a woman screamed in a neighbouring room; Jeanne started up in bed; presently she fancied she heard a man's laugh.

Then, as day approached, she began to think about Paul; and she dressed as soon as dawn came.

He lived in the Rue du Sauvage, in the City. She wanted to go there on foot, so as to carry out Rosalie's ideas of economy. It was fine, the cold air made the skin tingle; busy people were hurrying along the pavements. She walked as quickly as possible, following a street that was pointed out to her, at the end of which she was to turn to the right and then to the left; then, when she had reached a square, she would have to ask again. She did not find the square, and asked a baker, who gave her different directions. She went off again, missed her way, wandered about, followed other directions, lost herself completely.

In her bewilderment, she now began walking almost at haphazard. She was going to make up her mind to call a cab, when she saw the Seine. Thereupon she went along the quays.

After about an hour, she entered the Rue du

Sauvage, a kind of dark alley. She stopped at the door, and was so agitated that she could not stir a step.

Poulet was there, in that house.

She felt her knees and hands shaking; at last she went in, followed a passage, saw the door-keeper's box, and, offering him a piece of money, asked:

"Would you go up and tell M Paul de Lamare that an old lady, a friend of his mother, is waiting for him down here?"

"He doesn't live here, Madame," answered the doorkeeper.

A shudder ran through her.

"Oh! where--where does he live now?"

"I don't know."

She felt dazed, as if she was going to fall down, and remained unable to speak for some time. At length, she recovered self-control by a violent effort, and murmured:

"How long has he been gone?"

The man gave her the fullest information.

"A fortnight ago. They went away one night and didn't come back. They were in debt all over the place; so, of course, they didn't leave their address."

Jeanne saw gleams, great jets of fire, as if guns had been fired off before her eyes. A settled idea, however, sustained her, enabled her to remain standing, apparently calm and reflective. She intended to find Poulet.

"So he said nothing, when he went off?"

"Nothing at all. They took themselves off, so as not to pay, that's all."

"But he must send somebody to fetch his letters."

"He'll send more often than I'll give them. And, besides, he only had ten a year. I took them up one, however, two days before they went."

That was no doubt her letter.

"Listen," she remarked hurriedly, "I am his mother, and I have come to look for him. Here are ten francs for yourself If you have any news or any information about him, bring it me to the Hôtel de Normandie, Rue du Havre, and I'll pay you well."

"You may rely on me, Madame," he replied.

And she went away.

She began walking without bothering where she was going She hastened along, as if urged by important business, she walked by the walls, and was knocked about by people with parcels; she crossed streets without seeing the carriages coming along, and was abused by the drivers; she stumbled against the kerb-stones, to which she paid no attention; she hurried on, her soul in a whirl.

Suddenly she found herself in a garden, and felt so tired that she sat down on a seat. She was there apparently a very long time, crying without noticing it, because the passers-by stopped to stare at her. Next she felt she was very cold; and she got up to go away; her legs could hardly carry her, so worn-out was she and weak.

She thought of going into a restaurant and getting some soup, but she did not dare to go in; she felt a kind of shame, of fear, a sort of shame at her sorrow, which she knew people could see. She stopped a moment at the door, looked inside, saw

all the people at the table eating, and fled away in a fright, saying to herself: "I shall go into the next one." And she had not enough courage to do so.

At last she bought a crescent-shaped roll at a baker's, and started munching it as she walked on. She was very thirsty, but she did not know where to go for a drink; so she went without.

She went through an arch, and found herself in another garden, surrounded by arcades. She then recognized the Palais Royal.

As the sun and the walking had rather heated her, she sat an hour or two there.

A crowd came in, an elegant crowd that talked, smiled, bowed, that lucky crowd among whom the women are pretty and the men rich, which only lives for dress and amusement.

Jeanne, bewildered at being amongst such a brilliant company, got up to run off; but suddenly it occurred to her she might meet Paul there; and she began to roam about, scanning the faces, going continually to and fro, from one end of the garden to the other, with quick, humble steps.

Some turned and stared at her, others laughed and pointed at her. She noticed it and took herself off, thinking that they were doubtless amused at her appearance and the green-checked dress selected by Rosalie and made by the Goderville dressmaker according to her instructions.

She no longer dared even ask her way of the passers-by. At last, however, she risked it and returned to the hotel.

She spent the rest of the day on a chair at the foot of her bed, without moving. Then she dined,

as on the day before, off a soup and a little meat. Presently she went to bed, doing everything mechanically, from habit.

Next day she went to the prefecture of police, to see if they could find out where her son was. They would not make any promise; but they would attend to the matter.

She then wandered about the streets, always hoping to meet him. And she felt more lonely among that hurrying crowd, more lost, more wretched, than among the deserted fields.

When she came back to the hotel in the evening, she was told a man from M. Paul had asked for her, and that he would come again next day. A surging of blood rushed to her heart, and she did not shut her eyes that night. Suppose it was he? Yes, it certainly was, though she would not have recognized him by the details given her.

About nine in the morning there was a knock at her door, and she cried, "Come in!" ready to rush forth with open arms. A stranger appeared. And whilst he apologized for having disturbed her, and explained his business, which was the payment of one of Paul's debts, she felt herself beginning to cry and did not want him to see it; so she wiped away the tears with the tips of her fingers, as soon as they reached the corner of the eye.

He had heard of her arrival from the *concierge* of the Rue du Sauvage, and, as he could not find the young man, he turned to his mother. And he handed her a document, which she took without thinking of anything. She read the cypher, 90 francs, pulled out her purse, and paid.

She did not go out that day.

Next day, more creditors appeared. She gave them all she had left, only keeping twenty francs for herself; and she wrote to Rosalie to explain her position.

She spent the days in wandering about, waiting for the servant's reply, not knowing what to do, where to kill the gloomy hours, the interminable hours, having nobody to whom to utter a tender word, nobody who knew her wretchedness. She walked about at haphazard, haunted now by a longing to get away, to return home, to her little house by the side of the lonely road.

A few days before she could no longer live there, so overwhelmed was she with melancholy, and now, on the contrary, she felt she could only live there, where her dull habits had taken root.

At last, one evening, she found a letter and two hundred francs Rosalie wrote:

"Madame Jeanne, come back quick, because I shall not send you any more. As for M. Paul, I shall myself go and look for him, when we have news.

"My respects to you.

"Your servant

"ROSALIE."

And Jeanne started back to Batteville one morning when it was snowing and very cold.

CHAPTER XIV

Then she did not go out any more, she did not stir any more. She got up every morning at the same time, looked out of the window for the weather, and went down and sat by the fire in the drawing-room.

She remained there whole days without moving, her eyes fixed on the flames, giving free rein to her sorrowful thoughts and tracing the sad progress of her misfortunes. Darkness gradually invaded the little room without her making any other movement except to put more wood on the fire. Whereupon Rosalie brought in the lamp, and exclaimed:

"Come, Madame Jeanne, you must bestir yourself, or you won't be hungry again this evening."

She was often haunted by fixed ideas, which obsessed her, and tormented by trifling worries; in her sick brain the least things assumed an extreme importance.

She lived especially in the past, in the old past; she was haunted by the early periods of her life, and by her honeymoon in Corsica. The scenery of the island, which she had forgotten for a long time, suddenly rose up before her in the logs burning on the hearth; and she recalled all,

the details, all the little acts, all the faces she had met there; the face of the guide Jean Ravoli haunted her; and she sometimes thought she heard his voice.

Next, she dreamt of the sweet years of Paul's childhood, when he made her look after his salads, and she knelt in the rich soil by the side of Aunt Lison, each emulating the other in their careful work in order to please the child, competing which would use the greater skill in making the young plants grow and which would get the more new growths.

And her lips whispered: "Poulet, my little Poulet," as if she had spoken to him; and, her reverie stopping at the word, she sometimes tried for hours to write in the air with her outstretched finger the letters that made up the name. She traced them slowly, before the fire, imagining she saw them; then, believing she had made a mistake, she would recommence the "P" with an arm trembling with fatigue, forcing herself to draw the name right to the end; then, when she had finished, she would begin again.

At length she was unable to do more, muddled the whole thing, formed other words, and became quite distracted.

She had all the manias of lonely people. She was irritated at the least thing being moved from its place.

Rosalie often made her walk, accompanied her on the road; but, after twenty minutes, Jeanne would observe: "I can't go any further, my girl;" and would sit down at the side of the ditch.

She soon hated moving at all, and remained in bed as late as possible.

Since her childhood one habit had invariably stuck to her, that of getting up immediately after having drunk her *café au lait* She liked it in an exaggerated way, and she would have felt the want of it more than of anything else. Every morning she awaited Rosalie's coming with a rather sensual impatience; and, as soon as the full cup was placed on the night-table, she sat up and emptied it quickly and rather greedily. Afterwards, throwing back the bed-clothes, she began to dress.

Gradually, however, she got accustomed to dream for a few moments after having put the cup back in the saucer, then she lay down again on the bed; then she prolonged her idleness every day, until Rosalie came back angry and dressed her almost by force.

Moreover, she no longer had a semblance of will, and every time the servant asked her advice, put her a question, wished for her opinion, she answered: "Do as you please, my girl."

She fancied herself so directly pursued by persistent ill-luck that she became as fatalistic as an Oriental; and the result of continually seeing her dreams vanish and her hopes crumble away was that she no longer dared undertake anything, and that she hesitated whole days before accomplishing the simplest thing, being convinced that she would always be engaged in some unlucky path which would lead to disaster.

"I have had no luck in life," she would everlastingly repeat.

Whereat Rosalie exclaimed: "What would you say then if you had to work for your bread, if you were obliged to get up every day at six in the morning to do a day's work? Yet, there are many women who are obliged to do that, and, when they become too old, they die of want."

"You must remember I'm quite alone; my son has deserted me," answered Jeanne.

And then Rosalie burst into a furious temper:

"Well, what of that? Well, and how about children who are in military service, and those who go and settle in America?"

America was to her a vague country, where people go to make their fortunes, and whence they never return.

"There's always a time," she went on, "when there must be a separation, because the old and the young are not made to live together."—And she ended in a savage tone: "Well, what would you say if he were dead?"

And then Jeanne made no reply.

A little strength returned to her, when the air became milder in the first days of spring, but she only employed this return of activity by plunging more and more into gloomy thoughts.

One morning, when she went up to the garret to look for something, she chanced to open a box full of old almanacs; they had been kept, after the custom of some country people.

She seemed to find again the very years of her past, and the heap of square cards filled her with a strange, confused emotion.

She took and carried them down into the dining-room. They were of all sizes, large and small

And she began arranging them on the table according to the years. Suddenly she came upon the first one, the one she had brought to Les Peuples.

She looked at it a long time, with the days crossed out by her on the morning of her leaving Rouen, the day after her leaving the convent. And she cried. She wept sad, slow tears, the wretched tears of an old woman confronting her miserable life as it was exhibited on the table before her.

And an idea gripped hold of her, which soon became a terrible, incessant, wild obsession. She wanted to find out what she had done, almost every day.

She pinned the yellow cards, one by one, on the walls, on the tapestry, and spent hours opposite one or the other, asking herself: "What happened to me that month?"

She had put a mark on the memorable dates of her history, and she sometimes succeeded in reconstructing a whole month, by uniting, grouping, linking all the little facts that had preceded or followed an important event.

She managed, by dint of persevering attention, by efforts of memory, of concentrated will, to reestablish almost entirely her first two years at Les Peuples, since the far-off memories of her life came back to her with singular ease and a kind of relief.

But the following years seemed lost in a fog, to be mixed up, to tread one on the other; and she sometimes remained an enormously long time, with her head bent over an almanac, and her mind poring over former times, without even being able to remember whether such and such an incident was to be sought for in such and such an almanac.

She went from one to another around the dining-room, which was surrounded by these pictures of past days, as by engravings of a journey to Calvary. She would abruptly stop her chair before one of them, and would remain till night, looking at it without moving, buried in her researches.

Then, suddenly, when the saps awoke beneath the warmth of the sun, when the crops began to spring up in the fields, and the trees to grow green, when the apple-trees in the court-yards blossomed like pink balls and perfumed the plain, she was seized by a great agitation.

She could not keep quiet; she went to and fro, went out and came in twenty times a day, and sometimes she roamed a long way by the farms, distracted by a sort of fever of regret.

The sight of a daisy hidden in a tuft of grass, of a sunbeam gliding between leaves, of a pool of water in a rut in which the blue of the sky was reflected, stirred her, gave her tender feelings, upset her, by giving her again the sensations she had long ago, like the echo of her emotions when a young girl, when she used to dream in the fields.

She had shivered with the same agitations, had tasted the disturbing sweetness and intoxication of mild days, when she had a future to look forward to. She now experienced it all again, when she had no future. She still enjoyed it in her heart; but at the same time she suffered, as if the eternal joy of the re-awakened world, whilst penetrating her dried-up skin, her chilled blood, her crushed soul, could only impart to her now a weakened, painful charm.

It seemed to her, too, that in everything about her something was a bit altered. The sun appeared rather less warm than in her youth, the sky rather less blue, the grass rather less green; and the flowers, which seemed paler and less scented, were not quite so delicious.

Still, on certain days, she was penetrated with such a sense of well-being, that she began again to dream, to hope, to wait, for can one not always hope, when it is fine, in spite of the cruel hardness of fate?

She would walk on and on, for hours and hours, as if spurred by the excitement of her soul. And sometimes she stopped suddenly, and sat down by the roadside to reflect upon melancholy things. Why had she not been loved like others? Why had she not even known the simple happiness of a quiet life?

And sometimes, again, she forgot for a moment she was old, that there was no future for her, except a few mournful, lonely years, that all her path was mapped out; and she built, as she used to at sixteen, schemes dear to her heart; she would combine delightful glimpses of the future. Whereupon she would experience the harsh feeling of reality; she would get up, bent as if from the fall of a weight that had crushed her loins; and with slower steps she would start back to her house, murmuring: "Oh, you old fool! old fool!"

Rosalie was now continually remarking to her:

"Do keep quiet, Madame. Why do you want to move about like that?"

And Jeanne answered sadly:

"Well, I am like Massacre, in his last days."

One morning, the servant entered her room earlier than usual, and observed, as she put on the night-table the bowl of *café au lait:*

"Come, drink it up quick. Denis is waiting for us at the door. We're going to Les Peuples, because I have some business there."

Jeanne thought she was going to faint, she was so excited; and she dressed, trembling with emotion, bewildered and swooning at the thought of seeing her dear home again.

A radiant sky spread over the world; and the pony, growing frisky, now and then broke into a gallop. When they entered the parish of Étouvent, Jeanne felt she could hardly breathe, her heart beat so; and when she perceived the brick pillars of the gate, she whispered twice or thrice, in spite of herself: "Oh! oh! oh!" as if in the presence of things that stir the heart to the bottom.

They put up at the Couillards; then, whilst Rosalie and her son went about their business, the farmers proposed to Jeanne to pay a visit to the château, as the masters were absent, and they gave her the keys.

She went by herself, and when she was in front of the old manor, on the side of the sea, she stopped to look at it. There was no outward change. The sun was smiling that day on the stained walls of the vast, greyish building. All the shutters were closed.

A small piece of a dead branch fell on her dress; she raised her eyes; it came from the plane. She went up to the big tree with its pale, smooth skin, and stroked it with her hand as if it was an animal.

Her foot struck against a bit of decayed wood in the grass; it was the last fragment of the bench on which she had sat so often with all her relations, the bench that had been put down on the very day of Julien's first visit.

She next came to the double door of the hall, and had great difficulty in opening it, because the heavy, rusty key would not turn. At last the lock gave way, with a harsh creaking of the springs; and the door, which itself offered some resistance, swung back when it was pushed.

Jeanne at once went up, almost ran up, to her room. She did not recognize it adorned with a light paper; but, when she opened one of the windows, she was moved to the bottom of her being at the sight of that well-beloved horizon, the thicket, the elms, the heath, and the sea studded with brown sails that seemed motionless in the distance

Now she began prowling about the big, empty house. She saw marks on the walls that were familiar to her eyes. She stopped at a small hole made in the plaster by the Baron, who often amused himself, in memory of his young days, by lunging with his cane against the wall when he passed the place.

In her mother's room she found, stuck behind the door, in a dark corner, near the bed, a tiny gold-headed pin which she had once stuck there—she remembered it now—and which she had since looked for for years. Nobody had found it. She took it as a priceless relic and kissed it.

She went everywhere, looked about, recognised some almost invisible marks in the hangings of

the rooms which had not been changed, she saw again those odd shapes which the imagination often lends the designs of stuffs, of marbles, and the shadows on ceilings soiled by time.

She stepped silently, all alone in the huge silent château, as if she were going through a cemetery. Her whole life lay in there.

She went down to the drawing-room. It was gloomy, with its shutters closed, and it was some time before she could distinguish anything in it; presently, as her eyes grew used to the dark, she gradually recognized the high tapestries on which birds were stalking. Two arm-chairs remained before the fire-place, as if they had just been in use; and the very smell of the room, a smell it had always retained, just as human beings have theirs, a vague smell, yet quite recognizable, the sweet, faint odour of an old room, entered into Jeanne, surrounded her with recollections, intoxicated her memory. She stood gasping, as she breathed in this breath of the past, her eyes fixed on the two chairs. And all at once, by a sudden hallucination produced by her fixed idea, she fancied she saw, she did see, her father and mother warming their feet at the fire, as she had so often seen them.

She recoiled in a fright, knocked her back against the edge of the door, clung to it so as not to fall, with her eyes always fixed on the arm-chairs.

The vision had gone.

She was bewildered for some minutes; then she slowly recovered and wanted to run away, afraid of going mad. Her eyes fell by chance on the

wainscoting against which she was leaning; and she saw Poulet's ladder.

There were all the faint marks at unequal intervals on the wall, and numbers, cut with a penknife, indicated her son's age, the months, and the amount of growth. Now it was the Baron's rather big handwriting, now it was her own, rather small, now Aunt Lison's, rather shaky. And it seemed to her her son of olden days was there before her, with his light hair, gluing his little forehead against the wall, so that they could measure his height.

"Jeanne," cried the Baron, "he has grown a centimetre in six weeks."

She began kissing the wainscoting, in a frenzy of love

But they were calling her outside. It was Rosalie's voice. "Madame Jeanne, Madame Jeanne, lunch is waiting." She went out, her head muddled. And she did not understand what was being said to her. She ate the things dished up, heard people speaking without knowing about what, chatted no doubt with the farmers' wives who asked after her health, let herself be kissed, herself kissed the cheeks extended to her, and she got into the carriage again.

When the trees shut out of her sight the château's high roof, there was a horrible wrenching in her breast. She felt in her heart she had just bid her home good-bye for ever.

They came back to Batteville.

Just as she was about to enter her new abode, she saw something white under the door; it was a letter the postman had slipped in there in her

absence. She at once noticed it came from Paul, and opened it, trembling with anguish. He wrote:

"My dear Mamma,

"I did not write to you before, because I did not want you to make a useless journey to Paris, as I have always intended to come and see you myself. I am at present in great misfortune and great embarrassment. My wife is dying, after giving birth to a little girl three days ago; and I haven't a ha'penny. I don't know what to do with the child, whom my concierge is rearing with a feeding-bottle, as well as she can, but I am afraid of losing it. Could not you look after it? I positively don't know what to do, and I haven't the money to send it to a wet-nurse. Answer by return.

"Your loving son,

"Paul."

Jeanne fell back on a chair, and had scarcely strength enough to call for Rosalie. When the servant came, they read the letter together, then they looked at each other a long time in silence.

"I'll go and fetch the child myself, Madame," observed Rosalie at last. "It can't be left like that."

"Go, my girl," replied Jeanne.

They were again silent. The servant then went on:

"Put on your hat, Madame, and then we'll go to the notary at Goderville. If the woman's going to die, M. Paul must marry her, because of the little girl, later on."

And Jeanne put on her hat, without answering a word. A deep, unavowable joy flooded her heart, a perfidious joy which she intended to conceal at all costs, one of those abominable joys at which one blushes, but which one ardently exults in, in the mysterious secrecy of the soul:—Her son's mistress was about to die.

The notary gave the servant detailed instructions, which she made him repeat several times: after which, being certain of not making any mistake, she declared:

"Don't be afraid; I shall see to the business now."

She started for Paris the same night.

Jeanne spent two days in an agitation of mind that disabled her from thinking of anything. On the morning of the third day she received a mere line from Rosalie announcing her return by the evening train. Nothing else.

About three o'clock a neighbour drove her in his cart to the Beuzeville station to meet her servant.

She remained standing on the platform, her eyes looking down the straight line of rails, which as they fled approached each other down there, there, at the verge of the horizon. Now and then she looked at the clock. Ten minutes more! Five minutes more! Two minutes more! It's due now! Nothing appeared on the distant path. Then suddenly she saw a white spot, a smoke, then underneath it a dark speck, which grew and grew in size, rushing on at high speed. At length, the big machine, slowing down, passed snorting before Jeanne, who eagerly watched the windows.

Several doors were opened; people got out, peasants in blouses, farmers' wives with baskets, townspeople in soft hats. She at last caught sight of Rosalie, who was carrying in her arms a sort of linen bundle.

She wanted to go to her, but was afraid of falling, so weak had her legs become. Her servant, seeing her, came up with her usual, quiet manner, and said:

"Good-day, Madame; here I'm back; I had some bother."

"Well?" stammered Jeanne.

"Well, she died last night," replied Rosalie. "They were married; here's the baby." And she held out the infant, which could not be seen for the linen.

Jeanne took it mechanically, and they left the station, and got into the vehicle.

"M. Paul will come after the burial," continued Rosalie. "To-morrow at the same time, I suppose."

"Paul," murmured Jeanne, and said no more.

The sun was sinking towards the horizon, flooding with its brilliance the green plains, flecked here and there by the gold of colewort flowers, and by the blood of poppies. An infinite calm hovered over the quiet earth, in which the sap was springing. The cart went at a great pace, and the peasant clicked his tongue to urge his horse on.

And Jeanne looked straight into the air in front of her, into the sky which was cut by the circling flight of swallows, as if by rockets. And suddenly a gentle warmth, a heat of life penetrated her dress, reached her limbs, entered her flesh; it

was the warmth of the little being sleeping on her knees.

Whereupon an infinite emotion stirred her. She suddenly uncovered the child's face, which she had not yet seen: her son's daughter. And as the fragile creature, struck by the living light, opened its blue eyes and moved its mouth, Jeanne began kissing it wildly, raising it in her arms, overwhelming it with kisses.

Rosalie, however, stopped her in a good-humoured, but rough way.

"Come, come, Madame Jeanne, that's enough, you'll make it cry."

Then she added, doubtless in reply to her own thoughts:

"Life, you see, is never either so good or so bad as people imagine."

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